



Religion and culture
Michel Foucault

selected and edited by Jeremy R. Carrette

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Michel Foucault

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Routledge
New York

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First published in the USA in 1999 by

Routledge Inc

711 Third Avenue

New York, NY 10017

www.routledge-ny.com

Routledge edition published by special arrangement with

Manchester University Press

Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9NR, UK

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Foucault, Michel

Religion and culture / by Michel Foucault : selected and edited by

Jeremy R. Carrette

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-415-92361-1 — ISBN 0-415-92362-X (pbk.)

1. Religion and culture. I. Carrette, Jeremy R. II. Title.

BL65.C8F69 1999

291.17—dc21

99-30803

ISBN 0 415 92361 1 hardback

0 415 92362 X paperback

Typeset in Joanna with Frutiger Light Display
by Koinonia, Manchester

Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing be lost.

JOHN 6:12

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It is not that religion is delusional by nature, nor that the individual, beyond present-day religion, rediscovers his most suspect psychological origins. But religious delusion is a function of the secularization of culture: religion may be the object of delusional belief insofar as the culture of a group no longer permits the assimilation of religious or mystical beliefs in the present context of experience.

Michel Foucault [1962], *Mental Illness and Psychology*,
University of California Press, Berkeley, 1976, p. 81

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Cry of spirit

James Bernauer SJ

When Michel Foucault died, I mourned the silencing of a voice which had articulated such intense and necessary questions for me, first in his texts, then in his lectures and finally in several personal exchanges. What I had not anticipated on that sad June day in 1984 was the eloquent survival of that voice in the community of those many who have been drawn into dialogue as a result of dealing with Foucault's questions. For me it has been a personal as well as an intellectual pleasure to be in conversation with other readers of Foucault, men and women, in and outside of academic institutions. Jeremy Carrette is an exciting new interlocutor in those Foucauldian circles, as his essay at the beginning of this book makes very clear. While I was honoured by the invitation to write a foreword to his selection of Foucault's texts, I was reminded once again of how students of Foucault so often challenge one another to risk the exploration of new terrain rather than just report their knowledge of the already mapped. Certainly, Dr Carrette's request has directed me to a place which, I recognise now, desired more scrutiny.

His theme of Foucault's relationship to religion has jolted me back into a discarded personal moment which joined satisfaction and stress in equal measure. While I was writing the conclusion to my book *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward an Ethics for Thought*, after almost a decade of study, I found myself typing these final sentences:

Perhaps, as has been charged, his thought is 'not a shout of joy'. But, it should be asked, when did that become the standard for evaluating a thinker? As far as Foucault's work is concerned, we will have to be satisfied with hearing a voice that suffered with some of the victims, not only those of obvious captivities but also of modern liberties and their programs. It was a thought that struggled impatiently for new practices of freedom. Ultimately, it was a cry of spirit.¹

That last sentence had not been in any of the drafts from which I worked and seemed to come out of nowhere; it sounded inappropriate in the context and, to my ear, did not echo the Foucauldian ethical accent which my book had tried to capture. I had taken pride in trying to do a reading of Foucault's works which aimed at accurate rendition over imaginative interpretation. What is this 'cry of spirit'? I wanted to eliminate the sentence and perhaps even the 'shout of joy' to which 'cry' rhetorically

¹ J. Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward an Ethics for Thought*, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 1990, p. 184.

responded and end the book with the very Foucauldian ‘new practices of freedom’. But ‘spirit’ said something I wanted to say even if I could not have told you why. I had the feeling that there was something deeply accurate in the phrase and so it stayed and I hoped that no reviewer would make too much of a fuss over it. Dr Carrette’s invitation has led me back to my affirmation that Foucault’s thought was ultimately a cry of spirit and I must thank him for doing so. I hope that I will not weary the reader in indicating here why I believe it to be appropriate then and now.

Certainly I was acknowledging a personal sense of Foucault’s fullness of presence. I had first encountered Foucault in a reading of *Madness and Civilization* while I was on a long train trip to New York City. By the time of arrival I knew I was caught, intrigued by a mind, perhaps even hooked by a problematic. That led me to a lengthy stay in Paris where I was able to follow his courses in 1979 and 1980 and, later, his 1982 summer course in Toronto. Because of his characteristic solicitude for students, I also had the opportunity for several conversations with him. As a consequence, well before his biographies appeared, I did not need to ‘hallucinate’ Foucault, to use the word of a recent novel which integrated him into its plot. I felt privileged to have encountered a full spiritual presence: yes, the intellectual power which could intimidate at times, but also the emotional presence, a sense of humour, an interest in others, and a deep compassion for people especially those whom life turns into victims. That compassion may be touched in his books and interviews but it was also in his conversations. For example, I recall his intense concern with Poland’s Solidarity movement but also his special curiosity about an undergraduate programme in which I teach that has students make a very strenuous commitment to some form of social service (working in a homeless shelter, or a prison, or a hospice for the dying among others) while working through their philosophy and theology readings. He was keen to know about the course’s structure, and seemed pleased that it was not the social sciences which would provide the integrating perspective for the students’ experience. For me, ‘cry of spirit’ alluded to that legendary compassion and the unity of his philosophical life with the worldly experiences out of which his wisdom came, so different from mere academic brilliance.

As a Jesuit priest, I have often been met by surprise, occasionally hostility, when it is discovered that I am a respectful student of Foucault’s philosophy. ‘Why should a priest be concerned with that style of thought?’ ‘Wouldn’t it be more fruitful to be involved with a thinker engaged with, or at least open to, the religious rather than one identified with themes of madness, imprisonment and sexuality?’ I am sure that ‘cry of spirit’ was in part a reply to that narrow-mindedness which my area of research sometimes forced me to confront. Fortunately, I had many teachers through the years who had shown that philosophers who are also priests were stimulated, by that very commitment, to become adventuresome in thinking rather than assume guard duty for some ancient treasure. Less personally, my book’s final sentence indicated the importance which I attached to the experience of flight or escape in his work. That theme gave the title to the book and structured Foucault’s diverse investigations for me: first, an intellectual release from his earliest commitment to psychology as a human science; then his cathartic flight from the anthropological foundations for the

modern human sciences; third, his effort to place before the mind a constantly sounding dissonance, disruptive of our passion for historical harmony and continuity; next the dissident thinking he embraced as a way of freeing himself from the political programmes and creeds of both Marxism and liberalism; finally, his ecstatic thinking which witnesses to an ethical liberation from the project of modern humanism. While I am encouraged in my interpretation of Foucault by Dr Carrette's support for my description of Foucault's escapes as a form of negative theology, I believe that even the most a-theological of Foucault's readers would find it impossible not to see how distinctive was his effort to escape identities. He claimed he wrote in order to have no face, and certainly his readers will not forget their reaction to a special, strange ambition which expressed itself in lines such as these: 'Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write.'²

Certainly, Foucault is denouncing a type of academic morality but he is also, I now see, forging a spirituality. He once spoke of a 'world without a spirit', and I have come to understand how extensive that 'world without a spirit' was for him. I am tempted to claim that the single most important phrase in Foucault's writing is 'l'âme, prison du corps', 'the soul is the prison of the body'.³ If the principal streams of both Western and Eastern spiritualities have been to see a dualism between body and soul and to put forward an asceticism for liberating the soul from the body, Foucault envisions a dramatically different task: creating an alienation from one's soul, from how one's interior state and meaningful story have been constructed. Through his eyes, the very process of that soul taking on positive content in the human sciences turned it into something lifeless, ghostly and relating to it as one's centre established a phantom life and, thus, the greatest of human losses: not of one's world, but of one's spirit. Foucault presents a necessary spiritual art, a duty of self-relation, of going beyond how we have been created to experience ourselves as animated. He looked widely for anticipations of and traditional insights into this art. Biographers have told of how Foucault's examination of ancient and Christian texts as well as his dissatisfaction with the working conditions at the Bibliothèque Nationale led him to occupy the quiet reading room of the Dominican library of Saulchoir in Paris. At one point, however, he did take a look at the Jesuit Library of Centre Sèvres, to which I escorted him one afternoon. I remember that when we came to the first section of books, which a sign announced as 'dogmatic theology', he joked that this was not his place and rushed towards the section farther down the long room as his goal: moral theology. I mention the incident because this volume's texts show once again the depth of Foucault's interest in the practices rather than the theories of the moral and spiritual life. While his studies on Greek, Roman and Christian practices of the self exhibit the scholarly concerns of his last years, interviews such as the one on Zen included in this volume testify to his personal engagement.

² Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Harper Colophon, New York, 1976, p. 17 (British edition: Routledge, London, 1989).

³ Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir: naissance de la prison*, Gallimard, Paris, 1975, p. 34; *Discipline and Punish*, Pantheon, New York, 1977, p. 30 (British edition: Penguin, London, 1991).

I would argue that Foucault's own intellectual practice at this final stage is closer to the specific style of early Christian practice of the self than it is to the pagan. The ambition of his practice was not to strengthen the soul or confirm it in its truth but rather to renounce it, to transgress its borders, to reinvent one's relationship to it. His friend and patron Georges Dumézil emphasised in his posthumous tribute this most distinctive feature in Foucault's intellectual style: 'Foucault's intelligence literally knew no bounds, even sophisticated ones. He set up his observatory on the regions of living being where the traditional distinctions between body and soul, between instinct and idea, seem absurd: madness, sexuality, and crime.'⁴ These transgressions of traditional boundaries should be taken literally as, for example, when Foucault, in speaking about Zen, talks about the 'new relationships which can exist between the mind and the body'.⁵ For a modern culture, sustained as well as imprisoned by psychology and anthropology, Foucault came to esteem and utilise a Christian style of liberty which combined a care of the self with a sacrifice and mortification of that self. I knew, from his 1980 course at the Collège de France, 'The governance of the living', and even more clearly from his 1982 summer course, 'The discourse of self-disclosure', that Foucault was fascinated with Christianity's earliest form of penance: the public manifestation to a congregation of oneself as sinner and the dramatic renunciation of that dead soul. He was drawn to the paradox of a self-revelation that was also a self-destruction. His regard for that paradox increased even more his distance from the modern obligation to identify with that self which was fashioned by positive truths of self-knowledge. His cry of spirit is precisely an effective resistance to the prison for the human spirit today, not the body but the soul as fundamental personal truth and ground for self-relation. Self-possession is abandoned to a breath of life, a spirit in a spiritless, soul-filled world. His cry of spirit was commitment to passionate redefining of our relationship to the fruits of human intellect and discipline.

This Foucauldian spirituality of critical enlightenment had several stages in its evolution but I do think that it was his original project of a history of sexuality which fully opened this domain to him. Already in 1962 Foucault sensed that 'never did sexuality enjoy a more immediately natural understanding and never did it know a greater "felicity of expression" than in the Christian world of fallen bodies and of sin'.⁶ This region of spirit-soul struggles must have presented itself much more sharply as Foucault worked on the projected second volume of his series, which was to be entitled *Flesh and Body* (*La chair et le corps*) and was to have contrasted the modern biological concept of the body with the traditional Christian notion of the flesh. Although that volume was abandoned, I believe that we are able to appreciate the legacy of its research in the accents of Foucault's grasp of spiritual struggle and its vision of philosophical life. In exploring flesh, he would have come face to face with

⁴ 'Un homme heureux', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 29 June 1984. Cited in Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991, p. 329 (British edition: Faber & Faber, London, 1992).

⁵ 'Michel Foucault et le zen: un séjour dans un temple zen' in Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, 1954–1988, vol. III, Gallimard, Paris, 1994, p. 621; 'Michel Foucault and Zen: a stay in a Zen temple', in this volume, p. 112.

⁶ Michel Foucault, 'A preface to transgression' in this volume, p. 57.

an arena for self-relationship very different from the body–soul dichotomy. The Pauline flesh was not a body but rather an entire way of existing, an embrace of the carceral and slavish in contrast to that freedom of spirit discovered in living as children of God. Foucault's reading of Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome would have brought him into the combat of lives lived according to the flesh or the spirit. We might imagine Foucault nodding assent to Peter Brown's judgement about the historical significance of the struggle as Paul had formulated it: 'Paul crammed into the notion of the flesh a superabundance of overlapping notions. The charged opacity of his language faced all later ages like a Rorschach test: it is possible to measure, in the repeated exegesis of a mere hundred words of Paul's letters, the future course of Christian thought on the human person.'⁷ That conflict was to become associated with the dualism of body and soul in some of the Patristic writings but that theme is beyond my concern here. I do think it is difficult not to see traces of the spirit–flesh model of struggle in the key focus Foucault places on the relationship of one's self to the self or in some of the formulations of central directions for his life which he arrived at in the shadow of his death. For example there is his description of the motivation for changing the history of sexuality investigations: 'As for what motivated me, it is quite simple; I would hope that in the eyes of some people it might be sufficient in itself. It was curiosity – the only kind of curiosity, in any case, that is worth acting upon with a degree of obstinacy: not the curiosity that seeks to assimilate what it is proper for one to know, but that which enables one to get free of oneself.'⁸

Getting free of oneself. As ascetics and religious mystics have recognised through the ages, this getting free of oneself, of leaving the prison of one's soul need not guarantee passage to tranquil seas. If many choose a spirituality which despises the world and provides a shelter from it, Foucault was among those others who seek a spiritual existence which will expose them to the contingent mysteries of themselves and others. Such a spirituality might be thought of as that of the parrhesiast. Is not Foucault's delineation of the parrhesiast in his very last courses the description of a truth-teller dealing with spiritual discernments rather than the experience of truth attached to the roles of prophet, sage, or teacher? This is one of his formulations: *parrhesia* is a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, and risks his life because he recognises truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself). In *parrhesia*, the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy.⁹

Although his treatment of the practice of *parrhesia* was worked out in relation to Greek culture, careful textual review of his sources shows a definite dependence on

⁷ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1988, p. 48.

⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume Two*, Pantheon, New York, 1985, p. 8 (British edition: Penguin, London, 1992).

⁹ Michel Foucault, 'Discourse and truth: the problematization of *Parrhesia*' (Notes to the Seminar given by Foucault at the University of California, Berkeley, 1983). Edited by Joseph Pearson. Foucault Archive, Paris, Unpublished Document D213*, p. 8.

Christian understandings of *parrhesia* as well. While the frank speaking of confessional practice is the most evident of these sources, Foucault certainly knew how *parrhesia* took on a unique dimension in Christianity: not the political and moral virtues of the ancient world but the special power of courageous openness to the experiences of mystery. This strength was linked to Jesus of Nazareth's full revelation of God and to the person of prayer's openness to the divine realm. For the religious person, this *parrhesia*, this availability for spiritual transformation was a grace and the source of both hope and love.¹⁰

Foucauldian spirituality exhibits these two forces. Foucault possessed a non-ideological hope, a confidence that effective resistance could take place, even against the most entrenched of political or moral systems. Suspicion was an ally of his hope and its protector from ideological fiction and revolutionary excess. This is how he expressed his view in an unpublished part of a discussion with several Americans at Berkeley:

Despair and hopelessness are one thing; suspicion is another. And if you are suspicious, it is because, of course, you have a certain hope. The problem is to know which kind of hope you have, and which kind of hope it is reasonable to have in order to avoid what I would call not the 'pessimistic circle' you speak of, but the political circle which reintroduces in your hopes, and through your hopes, the things you want to avoid by these hopes.

When one of his discussants noted that his comment seemed 'very Christian', Foucault replied: 'Yes, I have a very strong Christian, Catholic background, and I am not ashamed.'¹¹ His hope is not built on a sense of sin, but who would deny that it reflects a Christian realism about human imperfection? It was Foucault's capacity for love and friendship, however, that was even more remarkable, as was shown in the extraordinary grief that met the news of his sudden death. He cared for many and communicated that care to friends, acquaintances, students and readers. His first biographer, Didier Eribon, indicated his gift for friendship in confessing a difficulty he met regularly in doing his research on Foucault's life: 'Many people found their relationship with Michel Foucault enormously important. But because I was writing a biography of Foucault, I had to focus on those who mattered to him, rather than on those for whom he mattered'.¹² Foucault's companion, Daniel Defert, made me think of this special gift for friendship when he wrote: 'Michel always gave each one the liberty to love him according [to] one's own way'.¹³

If I have placed my emphasis on a personal Foucauldian spirituality in this foreword, it is in large measure rooted in my respect for Dr Carrette's excellent treatment of the broader issues involved in Foucault's relationship to religion. We are in Dr Carrette's debt for establishing the basis of a new dialogue between Foucault's work and the searches of theologians and philosophers of religion. While I look forward to

¹⁰ For a brief study of the Christian notion and its treatment in scholarship, see Stanley Marrow, '*Parrhesia* and the New Testament', *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, vol. 44, July 1982, pp. 431–46.

¹¹ Document D250 (7) of the Foucault Archive, Paris, 21 April 1983 discussion between M. Foucault and P. Rabinow, B. Dreyfus, C. Taylor, R. Bellah, M. Jay and L. Lowenthal, 32 pages, p. 11.

¹² Michel Foucault, p. xii.

¹³ Note to J. Bernauer of 31 July 1984.

the energy and excitement of that conversation, I must conclude my thoughts here on a sad note.

Dr Carrette writes in his introduction about a discussion which, at Foucault's request, I arranged between him and several theologians. It took place on 6 May 1980 at the Jesuit community in Paris where I lived at the time. His desire for the discussion was motivated by his research in Christian authors and practices and he asked me to invite a few people who would be able to deal with some of his questions. Knowing the wide range of Foucault's interests and being uncertain as to where his work on Christianity was moving, I chose the discussants on the basis of their representation of very broad competencies and concerns. Among the invited was a Jesuit from Colombia, Mario Calderon, who I knew had been attending Foucault's lectures and who had a reputation for good understanding of Christianity's role in contemporary movements for social change. Calderon was later to leave the priesthood but he and his wife worked for a Jesuit-sponsored, Bogota-based social research institute which is deeply involved in the struggle for justice and human rights in Colombia, the Centre for Popular Investigation and Education. While I was in the process of planning this essay, I received the news that Mario and his wife, Elsa Alvarado, were murdered on 19 May 1997 by five assassins who carried identification as government agents. Although the killers have not been apprehended, there is firm belief that they were right-wing opponents of Mario and Elsa's work for justice. More than five thousand human rights activists marched through Bogota on the day after the killings to protest at the murders. I would like to dedicate this essay to the memory of Mario and Elsa.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book arose from my wider research on Foucault and religion.¹ It has been made possible by the generosity and friendship of the many people whom I encountered during the years of work. It was conceived somewhat unexpectedly over Guinness and the music of the melodion when my friend and French expert Richard Townsend offered to translate a number of texts. This work reflects to some extent a series of rewarding conversations on Friday afternoons in west London. It then took life through the encouragement of my friend and historian of psychology Sonu Shamdasani – he has always encouraged me to keep believing in myself and my project. In subsequent years I had the privilege of meeting and developing friendships with both David Macey and James Bernauer, who opened up ideas and gave me access to documents that any Foucault researcher dreams of reading. I am indebted to James Bernauer on many counts, not least for agreeing to write the foreword for this book, but also for inviting me to lecture at Boston College and for meetings in, through and beyond this work. The book formally took life through discussions with Grace Jantzen at Manchester University. The journey of our work together from King's College, London to Manchester University is one of many unexpected turns which have brought our paths to meet in extraordinary ways. I am indebted to Grace for all her support and encouragement – which has been immense – and for agreeing to include this work in the Manchester series on Religion, Culture and Gender for the UK publication. Without the support of these friends and colleagues this book would never have developed.

The book was further shaped by many fortuitous meetings and events which show the interdependence of all lives and ideas. I am grateful to Peter Selby, who has listened to many aspects of the development of this book, and to Mark Vernon, for offering to write the postscript and for sharing visits to the Foucault archive. These friendships were invaluable parts of my journey through my work in London, Manchester and Stirling and have enriched me enormously. In its final stages I have been grateful to Lucille Cairns and Elizabeth Ezra, from the French department at Stirling University, both of whom have provided enormous help in working through Foucault's texts. I would particularly like to thank Lucille for all her time, support and help in the final weeks completing this book – without her the final editing would have been much more difficult. I am very grateful to all those who have worked on the translations and to David Macey in particular for some helpful clarifications on some of the texts. My thanks also to Richard Lynch for his useful comments and continual updating on the Foucault archive. I owe a special thanks to David Halperin for extending the horizons of my thought, for his many useful insights and clarifications, and above all for his support and friendship.

Vanessa Graham at Manchester University Press has guided this project through the long and complex process of chasing copyright from Paris, New York, London and back to Paris. She anchored the whole project and with Adrian Driscoll and William Germano made the American Routledge publication possible. In addition I am grateful to John Banks and the production team at Manchester University Press for their helpful suggestions and comments. I would also like to thank my colleagues in the department of Religious Studies at Stirling University for their support and for granting me additional research time to finish this project. Many other friends and colleagues have shaped the outer contours of this work in ways only each individual is aware. I would like to thank in this respect the late Tony Dyson, Roy Findlayson, Otto and Jean Wangermann, Warren Colman, Anita Phillips, Hugh Pyper, Bridget Hinkley, Darrian Gay and Rob Tarling. Thanks also to Matthew Harrison for accommodation and company while in Paris.

I would like to thank the following publishers for permission to reproduce the texts in this book: Blackwell Publishers, Cornell University Press, Editions Bernard Grasset, Editions Gallimard, Eridanos Press, the London Review of Books, New Press, Penguin Books, Sage Publications and also Thomas Keenan.

¹ See J. R. Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, Routledge, London and New York 2000.

Acknowledgements

Without doubt one of my greatest debts is to my friend and colleague at Stirling University Richard King. He has followed many of the steps of this project and many years ago in a bookshop picked out a copy of Foucault's work – neither he nor I could have imagined what would have emerged from such a moment. Richard has become a true intellectual companion. I am deeply indebted to Richard King and Juli Stewart for their support – they have given me more than anyone could wish from friendship.

Finally, this book would not be complete without acknowledging my family for all their love and support through the years of this work. Research creates many debts and without the support of my mother, Susan Carrette, much of this dream would not have been realised. She died before this book went to print, and sadly she did not see one aspect of what her generosity and love made possible. Tim, Ruth and Simon have all in very different ways provided much support and encouragement. I am particularly grateful to my brother Tim for all his insight and understanding. Above all I am indebted to my father the Rev. Canon David Alan Carrette for all his loving engagement with me before he died. My father's death and the death of Foucault were the points from which this work began. This work rescues something of Foucault's unfinished works on religion and carries forward the spirit of my father's unpublished vision of pastoral ministry as inclusion rather than exclusion – to him I owe so much.

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS AND TRANSCRIPTS

One of the problems of Foucault scholarship is dealing with the many tapes, transcripts and interviews of Foucault's work. In certain cases this involves the complex process of working with texts that have been translated from Italian to French, oral transmissions that have been turned into written documents, and working with different versions of the same lecture or interview. There are inevitable difficulties involved in this process, and the editor and translators have attempted to deal with these textual irregularities in the most coherent and effective way possible.

There are also a number of problems with gender-exclusive language in Foucault's texts, both in existing translations and in Foucault's own work. This language has been retained in order to mark out clearly the gender-blind analysis of Foucault's work. This issue is discussed in my own essay at the beginning of this work.

Footnotes supplied by the present translators or editors are in square brackets.

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Prologue to a confession of the flesh

Jeremy R. Carrette

By spirituality, I understand – but I am sure that it is a definition which we cannot hold for very long – that which precisely refers to a subject acceding to certain mode of being and to the transformations which the subject must make of himself in order to accede to this mode of being. I believe that, in ancient spirituality, there was identity or almost so between spirituality and philosophy. (Foucault, 'Interview', 20 January 1984)

In March 1980, at the end of a private discussion with the Jesuit doctoral student James Bernauer, Foucault suggested setting up a meeting with a group of theologians. After a short correspondence between Bernauer and Foucault on the matter, the meeting took place on 6 May 1980 at the Jesuit community, 42 rue de Grenelle, Paris.¹ This meeting began by Foucault asking the assembled theologians where the idea of 'debitum', in the context of marital debt, originated. The room was soon silenced by Foucault's astonishing erudition on the matter. The philosopher-historian was courting the theologians.

Foucault's engagement with theology in the 1980s had been augmented by the various fragmented avenues of his multi-volume *History of Sexuality*. In the first volume in 1976 he saw Christianity as playing a fundamental role in shaping the discourse of sexuality in the West and some years later he examined Christianity according to a particular 'technology of self' based on the analytics of confession and salvation.² The transition from Christian themes of sexuality to the technologies of self in 1980 occurred through a series of intermediary concerns with 'governmentality' – both of the self and of the nation state. Foucault had considered the theme of 'governmentality' in his lectures at the Collège de France from 1978. It was this analysis which led Foucault to consider 'the government of souls and lives' and 'how one must

¹ Private interview with James Bernauer, October 1995; Bernauer–Foucault correspondence, letters 2 April; 18 April; 24 April 1980.

² See Foucault [1976], *The History of Sexuality Volume One: An Introduction*, Penguin, London, 1990 (American edition: Pantheon, New York, 1978); Foucault [1980], 'About the beginnings of the hermeneutics of the self' in this volume; [1982], 'Technologies of the self' in *Technologies of the Self*, ed. L. H. Martin, H. Gutman and P. H. Hutton, Tavistock, London, 1988, pp. 16–49 (American edition: University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1988).

be spiritually ruled and led on this earth in order to achieve eternal salvation'.³ These studies considered the issue of pastoral power and eventually led Foucault to become somewhat controversially interested in the question of a 'political spirituality' in the Iranian Revolution.⁴ In his lecture series from 1979 to 1980 Foucault extended his analysis of government to its 'wider sense of techniques and procedures designed to direct the behaviour of men', which involved a new consideration of the 'examination of conscience' and confession in early Christian literature.⁵ These themes of early Christian literature seemed to dominate Foucault's work, alongside his study of Greek and Roman literature, until the end of his life. However, Foucault's death from AIDS left the work incomplete, and the planned fourth volume of his *History of Sexuality* on Christianity was never published.⁶

The theological themes that Foucault introduced into his 1980 lecture series were – as Bernauer indicated in a private paper to the theologians who were to meet Foucault – striking in the context of his wider work to date: 'For many in his audience, the lectures Foucault presented this year, from January through March, must have seemed as though they were written by someone else. Certainly the cast was new: Philon d'Alexandrie, Hermes, Justin, Tertullian, Hippolyte, Cyprien, Origene, Jerome, Cassien.' As Bernauer continued: 'These were not figures with whom Foucault has been identified ... thought and praxis were continually introduced into his course and his interrogation of them reflects his current concern with theology in general and pastoral theology in particular.'⁷

The extension of Foucault's work into the theological documentation of the early church was perhaps surprising; but what is often neglected is the extent of Foucault's fascination with issues of Christianity and religion. It was neither restricted to his later work or merely a series of passing historical glosses. The 'explicit focus' on Christian experience may have occurred in the later works but, as Bernauer points out in his own study, there are 'scattered remarks' throughout his work to Christianity.⁸ There is in Foucault's work an important theological and religious sub-text which remains

³ Foucault [1978], 'Governmentality' in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentability*, ed. G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1991, pp. 87–8.

⁴ Foucault [1979], 'The spirit of the world without spirit' in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interview and Other Writings*, ed. L. D. Krizman, Routledge, London, 1988 (American edition: Pantheon, New York, 1980); Foucault [1979], 'Is it useless to revolt?' in this volume. For a discussion of the Iranian question see G. Stauth [1991], 'Revolution in spiritless times: an essay on Michel Foucault's enquiries into the Iranian Revolution' in *Michel Foucault: Critical Assessments*, ed. B. Smart, vol. III, Routledge, London, 1994, pp. 379–401, and C. Jambet [1989], 'The constitution of the subject and spiritual practice' in *Michel Foucault: Philosopher*, ed. T. J. Armstrong, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1992, pp. 233–47.

⁵ See Foucault [1980], 'On the government of living', and Foucault, 'About the beginning of the hermeneutics of the self', both in this volume.

⁶ The fourth volume was to be entitled *Les aveux de la chair* (*Confessions of the Flesh*). The volume was almost complete before Foucault's death and a copy of it is privately held in the Foucault archive. It cannot be published under the restrictions of the Foucault's estate. See Part 3 below for material which would have contributed to the final volume.

⁷ Bernauer, private paper introducing Foucault to theologians, 28 April 1980. Those present at the meeting included Alfonso Alfaro, Mario Calderon SJ, Charles Kannengiesser SJ, Gustave Martelet SJ and William Richardson SJ. This meeting is unfortunately not discussed in any of the biographies.

⁸ J. Bernauer, *Michel Foucault's Force of Flight: Toward an Ethics for Thought*, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 1990, p. 161.

unexamined and neglected. It is the aim of this volume of texts to bring together for the first time Foucault's engagement with religious themes outside the main corpus of his writing.

Foucault's work in many ways, to use one of his dramatic phrases in a different context, 'prowls the borderlands of Christianity'.⁹ He is a writer who engages with the historical and political formations of Western culture, of which religion is a formative stratum. Foucault's work is also informed by the residue of his French Catholic background and more importantly by the avant-garde fascination with religious ideas, particularly in the works of Georges Bataille. Foucault may come from the intellectual left wing with its fundamentally atheist values but he is not immune to religious images and ideas. His work, alongside many so-called post-structuralist writers, engages with many theological themes with fresh historical and analytical critique, reappraising the sources of Western culture.

What Foucault does is to open new frontiers on the boundaries of sexuality, religion and politics, extending the platform of religious discourse by bringing it back into the historical process, not in an Hegelian sense, but by dislocating the subject and object of religious meaning through an analysis of truth, power and the body. The theological and religious ideas become invested with a new currency which is often difficult to isolate and locate when the epistemological categories are redrawn. There is in Foucault, as in much of contemporary continental philosophy, a re-mapping of religious ideas. It is the need to understand this new positioning that makes Foucault's work even more significant to theologians and philosophers of religion.

Theological invitations

It is a tragedy that Foucault's death will not allow him to show how his last theme of care of the self would have provided a home for those voices of transcendence which his works encouraged his readers to hear, often for the first time. That unfinished business is an invitation to others. (James Bernauer, 'The prisons of man', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 4, p. 36)

The dialogue between Foucault and religion has to a large extent been ignored and subsumed under the more prominent disciplinary concerns of philosophy and social science. There is however a growing body of literature within religious studies and theology which has utilised Foucault's methodological framework to explore certain religious and theological themes.¹⁰ These studies are concerned with the application

⁹ Foucault [1966], 'Maurice Blanchot: the thought from the outside' in Foucault/Blanchot, Zone Books, New York, 1987, p. 16.

¹⁰ The literature applying Foucault to religious themes is varied and constantly expanding, see for example: B. Turner [1983], *Religion and Social Theory*, Sage, London, 1991; S. Welch [1985], 'The truth of liberation theology' in *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, ed. I. Diamond and L. Quinby, Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1988, pp. 207–28; D. Chidester, 'Michel Foucault and the study of religion', *Religious Studies Review*, vol. 12, no. 1, 1986, pp. 1–9; S. A. Ray, *The Modern Soul: Michel Foucault and the Theological Discourse of Gordon Kaufman and David Tracey*, Fortress, Philadelphia, 1987; M. P. Lalonde, 'Power/knowledge and liberation: Foucault as parabolic thinker', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1993, pp. 81–100; S. D. Moore, *Mark and Luke in Post-structuralist Perspective: Jesus Begins to Write*, Yale

of Foucault's work, rather than attempting to ascertain the nature of Foucault's own theological and religious concerns. The absence of theological and religious engagement with Foucault's work results predominantly from a lack of awareness of his more peripheral articles and interviews and the specific 'strategic' use by Foucault of religious concepts and history. There is no specific discussion of religion or any clear outline of his theological views. They remain components of wider social and political issues. One other problem is the reluctance of the wider theological community to explore ideas in contemporary continental philosophy because of the principal alliance of theology with analytical certainties and the resulting anxiety about 'truth' created by post-structuralist thinkers such as Foucault.¹¹ Foucault's religious and theological ideas have become neglected because of the closure of religious discourse in Foucault studies and the closure of Foucault studies inside theology and the philosophy of religion. It is only with the emergence in the 1990s of critical theory and cultural studies inside religious studies that Foucault is finding a new audience in religion and theology – as disciplinary boundaries are redefined Foucault's work finds new possibilities.

There are however a few works which consider the theological and religious views contained in Foucault's work, the most significant of which comes from James Bernauer, who, as I have already indicated, was one of the first to engage personally in a theological dialogue with Foucault.¹² Bernauer picked up the weight and relevance of Foucault's work theologically, providing the first detailed outline of Foucault's later work on Christianity.¹³ Bernauer carefully unfolds the later interest in Christianity from the study of confession (which Foucault told him was originally suggested by Ivan Illich) to the examination of the work of John Cassian and the Christian technology of self. Despite his presenting these theological and religious perspectives, few have taken up the challenge to grapple with the intricacies of Foucault's writings on religious themes.

University Press, New Haven, 1992; E. Castelli, 'Interpretations of power in 1 Corinthians', *Semeia* 54, 1992, pp. 199–222; J. Behr, 'Shifting sands: Foucault, Brown and the framework of Christian asceticism', *The Heythrop Journal*, vol. 34, no. 1, January 1993, pp. 1–21; J. D. Caputo, 'On not knowing who we are: madness, hermeneutics, and the night of truth in Foucault' in *Foucault and the Critique of Institutions*, ed. J. D. Caputo and M. Yount, Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania, 1993, pp. 233–62; G. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995; and I. Strenski, 'Religion, power, and final Foucault', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 66, no. 2, summer 1998, pp. 345–67.

¹¹ For a discussion of the relationship between Foucault and analytical philosophy see C. G. Prado, *Descartes and Foucault: A Contrastive Introduction to Philosophy*, University of Ottawa Press, Ottawa, 1992, and C. G. Prado, *Starting with Foucault: An Introduction to Genealogy*, Westview, Boulder, Colorado, 1995. There is a fundamental difference in the construction of 'religion' in Continental and analytical philosophy. In Continental philosophy religion equates with the unconscious, the Other and the symbolic, while in traditional analytical thinking it is seen within dualistic categories and separate from the world.

¹² As stated earlier in the text, Bernauer had a private discussion with Foucault in 1980 and organised a meeting for Foucault with theologians in 1980. Cf. Bernauer, 'The prisons of man: an introduction to Foucault's negative theology', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 4, issue 108, 1987, pp. 356–80, and Bernauer, *Force of Flight*.

¹³ Bernauer, *Force of Flight*, pp. 158ff.

Bernauer's book-length study, regarded by David Macey as one of the best introductions,¹⁴ offers an excellent reading of Foucault by examining the nature of his 'thought', and in consequence appreciates both the style and process of Foucault's thinking. The central aspect of this thought, according to Bernauer, 'is precisely this dynamic movement of relentless questioning that refuses to remain with one specific area of study and draw out fully the implications of a particular investigation'.¹⁵ Foucault is seen as formulating a series of experiments to escape the contemporary prisons of thought. Bernauer traces this intellectual journey through the 'extraordinary experience that we call thinking'.¹⁶ He is shown to struggle with the Kantian limits, to build an anti-humanist stance against psychology and phenomenology, to enter a 'cathartic' exercise in *The Order of Things*, to play 'dissonant' sounds in his archaeological method, to demonstrate 'dissident' thinking in his political tasks and finally to discover the ecstasy of relinquishment in an ethical space of intellectual freedom.¹⁷

It is within the area of ethical thinking – which Bernauer regarded later with Mahon as a politics of self – that Bernauer found substantial theological significance, regarding Foucault's thinking as 'ecstatic' and referring to it as 'a worldly mysticism'.¹⁸ These phrases could be powerful metaphors indicating a position outside the dominant lines of thinking, but they also contain presuppositions about the nature of mysticism; for as Grace Jantzen and Richard King have argued, mysticism is not separate from the politics of gender (Jantzen) and colonial power (King).¹⁹ Bernauer's suggestion is not, as he points out, 'an arbitrary imposition', but arises from a series of enigmatic references to negative theology by Foucault himself.²⁰ Although negative theology does not necessarily equate with 'mysticism' Bernauer opened up a series of oblique references in Foucault's texts in order to ascertain the theological relevance of negative theology in relation to Foucault's work. Foucault first made references to negative theology in his 1966 piece on Blanchot and later returned to this theme in his lecture at the Collège de France on 30 January 1980.²¹ Foucault had also made the suggestion that his thought was a negative theology in a private meeting with Bernauer on 12 March 1980. At this meeting he supported the suggestion that his work could be compared to negative theology, but as applied to the human sciences not the divine sciences.²² Foucault was therefore drawing a parallel between his own negations in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* in relation to the human sciences and the theological tradition of

¹⁴ Private discussion. Cf. D. Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, Hutchinson, London, 1993, pp. xxi; 133; 481 (American edition: Vintage, New York, 1995).

¹⁵ Bernauer, *Force of Flight*, p. 6.

¹⁶ Bernauer, *Force of Flight*, p. 24.

¹⁷ Bernauer, *Force of Flight*, p. 175ff.

¹⁸ Bernauer, *Force of Flight*, p. 178. Cf. Bernauer and Mahon, 'The ethics of Michel Foucault' in *Foucault: The Cambridge Companion*, ed. G. Gutting, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 141–58.

¹⁹ Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, pp. 4–25 and R. King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-colonial Theory, India and the 'Mystic East'*, Routledge, London, 1999.

²⁰ Bernauer, *Force of Flight*, p. 178.

²¹ Foucault, 'Maurice Blanchot: the thought from the outside'; private meeting with James Bernauer, who was present at the 30 January lecture at the Collège de France.

²² Bernauer–Foucault meeting 12 March 1980. I am extremely grateful to James Bernauer for this material and for his generous support during my research work. Bernauer, *Force of Flight*, p. 178.

Pseudo-Dionysius. It is however important to emphasise that Foucault is at this point comparing styles of thought rather than aligning his work with theology.²³

The theological parallel however enabled Bernauer creatively to explore Foucault's work as a 'negative theology' based on Foucault's 'negative anthropology', to link the negation of 'man' to the theological negations of God. Bernauer develops Foucault's work by inextricably linking theology with anthropology similarly to the way Foucault links the death of man to the death of God. Recalling his meeting with Foucault, Bernauer writes: 'Foucault's negative theology is a critique not of the conceptualisation employed for God but of that modern figure of finite man whose identity was put forward as capturing the essence of human being'.²⁴

Bernauer argues that Foucault's work is more adequately understood as a 'negative theology' than a 'negative anthropology' because 'its flight from man is an escape from yet another conceptualisation of the Absolute'.²⁵ Bernauer attempts to isolate one particular theological dimension of Foucault's anti-humanism, but does not enter into the specific theological content of Foucault's views or critically examine the nature of his wider theological and religious ideas. What Bernauer offers is a theological vignette to stimulate further analysis, a fragment from Foucault's religious discourse. His aim is therefore to highlight the 'relevance' of Foucault's work for religion, to provide possibilities of theological dialogue, and, principally, to 'invite interest' from the theological tradition.²⁶ Bernauer's work assumes an historical significance both in his personal engagement with Foucault and in setting the intellectual agenda for theology, but the task remains to be completed. This volume of texts is itself an attempt to extend Bernauer's invitation for a theological dialogue with Foucault and open up a new territory of religious thinking.

In my own work I am seeking to take seriously the religious fragments of Foucault's work in order to rescue his silenced discussion of Christianity brought about by his death. Foucault left behind sufficient fragments in his lectures and interviews for us to see the outer contours of his final unpublished work. There are also sufficient reflections in his earlier work to thread together a fascinating tapestry of Foucault's own religious questions – both in formal writings, lectures, interviews and in more casual interactions. I have written about these ideas in greater depth elsewhere, but this volume seeks to bring together the most important of Foucault's extraneous writings on religion and culture.²⁷ Before I outline the texts in detail I want, as a way of introduction, to examine some of the central issues which have arisen in Foucault studies since his death in 1984. First, I want to examine briefly the question of the gendered nature of Foucault's work. I want to explore how Foucault scholarship can responsibly engage with Foucault's work on religion in the light of

²³ Foucault does not regard his own work as supporting a link with negative theology in any literal sense. He was not making theological statements, but rather noting structural parallels. For a wider discussion of my opposition to those who wish to link Foucault to negative theology see J. R. Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*, Routledge, London and New York, 2000.

²⁴ Bernauer, *Force of Flight*, p. 178. Cf. Bernauer, 'The prisons of man', pp. 375ff.

²⁵ Bernauer, *Force of Flight*, p. 178.

²⁶ Bernauer, 'The prisons of man', pp. 366–7.

²⁷ See J. R. Carrette, 'Male theology in the bedroom: Foucault, de Sade and the body', *John Rylands Bulletin*, vol. 8, no. 3, autumn 1998, pp. 215–33, and Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*.

feminist thinking I then want to examine in greater detail the issue of religion in the biographies of Foucault – particularly the controversial work by James Miller – in order to explore how Foucault's work on religion has been presented and in some cases positively distorted. I hope that by clearing the ground to think more critically about Foucault's work on religion a new appreciation of Foucault's work can be developed – and perhaps one day his unpublished work may see the light – not in contravention of Foucault's will but as a confirmation of what he had already delivered in lectures and published in articles.

Foucault, religion and the question of gender

The Christian pastoral prescribed as a fundamental duty the task of passing everything having to do with sex through the endless mill of speech. (Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume One: An Introduction*, p. 21)

Foucault's later work on religious ideas, and some of his earlier studies, are to a large extent shaped by his examination of the 'emergence' of sexuality inside the Christian technology of the self. In his later work Foucault highlights the influence of Christianity in the construction of the Western sexual subject, and in his earlier work we find the links between the sexual body and religious thought; for example, Foucault's archival research on madness reveals the historical misogyny of religious thinking, and his work on Bataille and Klossowski bring together sexuality and theology. However, the absence of any gender critical perspective in these writings on religion and sexuality has not surprisingly been the focus of much feminist analysis, and it raises the question of how to read Foucault's work on religion in a gendered context. How are the ideas which Foucault formulates on religion inscribed with a gendered perspective? How far has Foucault been complicitous with the religious institutions which have silenced and abused women and distorted men? How do we read Foucault's texts on religion with an awareness of the politics of gender?

The relationship between feminist writers and Foucault over the last twenty years has rightly been one of 'continual contestation', to quote Sawicki.²⁸ The initial relationship, which has been characterised variously as a kind of 'flirting' (Morris 1979), 'loving' (Fraser 1989), 'dancing' (McNeil 1993) and 'friendship' (Diamond and Quinby 1988), soon became focused in the realisation that there was an awkward alliance with a 'malestream theorist' (Hekman 1996).²⁹ What remained, according to

²⁸ J. Sawicki, 'Feminism and the power of Foucauldian discourse' in *After Foucault: Humanistic Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges*, ed. J. Arac, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1991, p. 176.

²⁹ M. Morris [1979], 'The pirate's fiancée: feminists and philosophers, or maybe tonight it'll happen' in *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1988, p. 26; N. Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1989, p. 65; M. McNeil, 'Dancing with Foucault: feminism and power-knowledge' in *Up Against Foucault: Explorations of Some Tensions between Foucault and Feminism*, Routledge, London, 1993, p. 147; I. Diamond and L. Quinby, ed., 'Introduction' in *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1988, p. ix; and S. Hekman, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault*, Pennsylvania State University Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1997, p. 1.

Lois McNay, in the feminist dialogue with post-structuralist writers such as Foucault, was a 'stimulating crossover'.³⁰ Foucault offered a critical framework for social and political analysis but was seen at times to destabilise the force of emancipatory politics by questioning the power of agency in the idea of docile bodies and ignoring women in his analysis of the historical conditions of knowledge. Foucault was also seen to be guilty of employing male normative models of the body and sexuality and holding an analysis of violence which did not take adequate account of the specific violence against women in rape.³¹

However, in an attempt to appreciate the diversity of positions in Foucault's work, Lois McNay highlighted the value of Foucault's late work on the aesthetics of the self as a critique of his earlier excesses. McNay renewed the possibility of a fundamental affirmation of the self and autonomy in the feminist dialogue with Foucault – she believed that Foucault's work allowed for a critical struggle to overcome the oppressive which in turn allowed for a positive affirmation of what one may become.³² There is however some dispute in feminist circles as to whether Foucault's late work is so distinct from his earlier ideas. Amy Richlin's critical essay on Foucault's *History of Sexuality* has powerfully asserted the unacceptability of the 'erasure of the female' from studies in late antiquity.³³ Richlin is sharply critical of McNay and other feminist philosophers who are prepared to accept so easily Foucault's (misogynist) reading of late antiquity.³⁴ These tensions are in part about the different political priorities and disciplinary value of Foucault to feminist philosophers and feminist historians. Foucault is tactically useful to philosophers to undermine the dominant patriarchal structures of much Anglo-American analytical thinking by historicising knowledge, something (on the whole) less urgent for historians – different disciplinary knowledges have different political strategies. In the continuing dialogue what does become clear is that however much Foucault has helped feminist thinking in the late twentieth century he remains caught in an androcentric paradigm.³⁵ The resolution of this dilemma will always plague feminist appropriations of Foucault.

Following the work of Amy Richlin and others we cannot walk away from the fact that Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (and his other works) are principally focused on male paradigms. Foucault's limited representation of women in his *History of Sexuality* is simply an injustice to the literature of ancient Greece or Rome. 'Ancient women', as Richlin states, 'did write'.³⁶ What are we to make of the absent voices in the history of madness, medicine, the prison and the history of sexuality? Do we to simply 'move

³⁰ L. McNay, *Foucault and Feminism*, Northeastern University Press, Boston, 1992, p. 195.

³¹ See McNay, *Foucault and Feminism*, pp. 33; 45–6.

³² McNay, *Foucault and Feminism*, pp. 197–8; McNay, *Foucault: A Critical Introduction*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 145.

³³ See M. Lloyd, 'A feminist mapping of Foucauldian politics' in *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault*, ed. S. Hekman, Pennsylvania State University Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1996, pp. 251–3; Richlin, 'Foucault's *History of Sexuality*: a useful theory for women?' in *Rethinking Sexuality: Foucault and Classical Antiquity*, ed. D. H. Larmour, P.A. Miller and C. Platter, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1998, p. 142.

³⁴ Richlin, 'Foucault's *History of Sexuality*', pp. 166–7.

³⁵ Hekman, *Feminist Interpretations*, p. 1.

³⁶ Richlin, 'Foucault's *History of Sexuality*', p. 153.

on', as Richlin suggests, or is there a political value in looking at Foucault's texts from a new gender-awareness which can strategically acknowledge the omissions and rescue the value of his work? If Foucault's writings carry the injustice of gender-blind analysis, if the construction of otherness, sexuality and ethical subjects exclude women, and if Foucault has uncritically read the ancient texts, what are we to make of Foucault's work? What is the value of Foucault's project and why has his work so powerfully attracted so much attention? Why should we be bothered to struggle with the texts? The feminist responses, as we have seen, have been varied, and in approaching Foucault's work on religion we need constantly to bear in mind the problems and values of Foucault's work.

There are, as pro-Foucault feminist writers have argued in relation to his wider critical projects, numerous reasons for wrestling with Foucault's work on religion. First, Foucault's work provides a critical apparatus in which to challenge the epistemological assumptions of religious and theological thinking. He provides us with new ways to reconceptualise and 'think differently' about religion. Foucault's work is a critical project which strategically breaks open the hegemonic structures which have ordered Western religious thinking and subjectivity. He provides ways to allow 'difference' and the 'Other' a voice. While he oppressively omits to explore the position of women his methodological stance creates the conceptual space to critique Foucault's own exclusions. What Foucault offers is a project of political disruption, not an anarchic chaos, but a 'problematisation' of the practices of normalisation and control.

It is true that my attitude isn't a result of the form of critique that claims to be a methodical examination in order to reject all possible solutions except for the valid one. It is more on the order of "problemization" – which is to say, the development of a domain of acts, practices, and thoughts that seem to me to pose problems for politics.³⁷

Foucault's writings on religion offer a series of critical interventions that question the conditions of religious knowledge. He questions the alliance of medicine and church, disruptively locates (male) sexuality at the site of the death of God, examines the politics of mystery in literature, he reveals the power of religious revolts, uncovers the disciplinary regimes of religious institutions and exposes technological practices which shape the Western ethical subject and give birth to the emergence of (male) sexuality. The texts in this volume give clear witness to the range and depth of Foucault's 'problematisation' of religion.

It is however precisely the radical displacement of religious knowledge that so powerfully brings to light the omission of gender in such critical enquiry. For all the tactical and strategic disruption of religion, Foucault fails to acknowledge the gendered nature of the religious practices. Foucault's work in consequence requires a dialogue with feminist theologians and feminist historians who struggle to overcome the oppression of patriarchy. The voices of feminist theologians and historians of religion

³⁷ Foucault [1984], 'Polemics, politics, and problemizations' in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, Penguin, London and New York, 1991, p. 384. On the idea of 'problematisation' see also Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, Penguin, London, 1992, pp. 10–13 (American edition: Pantheon, New York, 1985) and Foucault [1983], 'Problematics' in *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews, 1961–1984*, 2nd edition, ed. S. Lotringer, Semiotext(e), New York, 1996, pp. 416–22.

writing at the same time as Foucault in the 1960s, 1970s and early 1980s need to be brought into dialogue with Foucault's texts. Foucault's world needs to be opened up to the critique developed by Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Elizabeth Fiorenza, Carol Christ, Judith Plaskow, Naomi Goldenberg and Luce Irigaray, to name only a few of the leading names within feminist theology at the time.³⁸ To rescue Foucault's texts on religion without engaging with these thinkers is to have missed a revolution in religious and theological thinking – the difficult (and humbling) task for us all is to join the fragments of differing revolutions in order to fight against all forces of oppression.

Foucault's texts are 'without women' but they are also, as Richlin notes, 'without Jews ... without Africans ... without children, babies, poor people, slaves'.³⁹ Foucault scholarship needs to register the lacunae in Foucault's reading of religious history, it needs to register that the death of God is often the death of a masculine divinity, that the explorations of Islam and Buddhism are not informed by the discourse of Orientalism and postcolonial theory, it needs to register all the selective readings and omissions, but there needs also to be a recognition of what Foucault's work does offer, there needs to be acknowledgement of how effective Foucault's work has been in drawing out the regimes of power and political constructions of knowledge.

Devoney Loosner's incisive bibliographical essay on feminist theory and Foucault shows precisely why feminist thinkers continue to struggle with Foucault's texts.⁴⁰ Foucault may be problematic for feminists but his ideas have also been instrumental in transforming the discussion of gender, bodies, sexuality, power and the politics of knowledge. In approaching Foucault's writings on religion it is therefore necessary to find ways of reading Foucault that are open to his theoretical insights while holding a critical awareness of the gender bias. The feminist appraisal of Foucault is similar in this sense to the feminist appraisal of Christianity and religion: there can be either a rejection, a selective or critical acceptance or a critical adaptation. What we need to learn, as Earl Jackson in his writings on queer theory makes clear, is 'how to read and write from responsibly identified positions'.⁴¹ We need in effect to find ethically responsible ways of reading and writing that take account of the multivalent forces which shape our world.

³⁸ See for example M. Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1973; R. R. Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk*, SCM Press, London, 1983; E. S. Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, SCM Press, London, 1983; C. P. Christ and J. Plaskow, ed., *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion*, Harper and Row, New York, 1979; N. Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religion*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1979; L. Irigaray [1984], 'Divine women' in *Sexes and Genealogies*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1993. For an overview of feminist thinking and religion see A. Loades, 'Feminist theology' in *The Modern Theologians*, 2nd edition, ed. D. F. Ford, Blackwell, Cambridge, 1997, pp. 575–84, and U. King, ed., *Religion and Gender*, Blackwell, Cambridge, 1995.

³⁹ Richlin, 'Foucault's History of Sexuality', p. 139.

⁴⁰ D. Loosner, 'Feminist theory and Foucault: a bibliographic essay', *Style*, vol. 26, no. 4, winter 1992, pp. 593–603. Loosner's essay is a useful discussion of literature up to 1992. Since then a number of important texts and collections have been published. Hekman, *Feminist Interpretations*, is a more up-to-date reflection on the range of positions in the 'continual contestation' between feminist theory and Foucault.

⁴¹ E. Jackson, *Strategies of Deviance: Studies in Gay Male Representation*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1995, p. 267. I am grateful to David Halperin for introducing me to this work.

It is in the work of queer theory (theory which, as David Halperin notes, benefits not only lesbians and gay men but anyone challenging heteronormative powers) that Foucault's work has found one of its most positive receptions. As David Halperin makes clear in his reading of *The History of Sexuality*:

Foucault's project has a special importance, resonance, and urgency for lesbians and gay men, who for too long have been the objects rather than the subjects of expert discourses of sexuality – who have been the objects, in particular, of murderously pathologizing, criminalizing, and moralizing discourses, one of whose comparatively minor effects has been to deauthorize our subjective experiences and to delegitimate our claims to be able to speak knowledgeably about our own lives.⁴²

Halperin's valuable recognition of the importance of Foucault for gay and lesbian studies enables us to see how Foucault's work has provided 'effective histories' through which to question and challenge the dominant ideologies within Western society. Foucault's work has so easily been criticised from the perspective of the archive that it should now be apparent that Foucault is not an 'historian' in any traditional sense but someone using historical material to illuminate 'specific' struggles. Cousins and Haussins made this point early on in Foucault scholarship. They saw Foucault's works as more like 'case studies' than historical records, and to confuse the genres is to misunderstand Foucault.⁴³ The case study selectively uses material to make a therapeutic, or in Foucault's case, a 'political' statement. The value of Foucault's work is in what it changes rather than in what it creates. Foucault's writings on religion and theology should be seen in terms of this interventionist and strategic engagement.

One of the problems in reading Foucault, as Gayatri Spivak points out, is that because of 'discipleship' Foucault is being read as a 'universal' rather than as a 'specific' intellectual.⁴⁴ Foucault is not providing a complete systematic analysis of religion or any other cultural phenomena. His work rather raises problems and questions.

The role of the intellectual is not to tell others what they have to do. By what right would he do so? ... The work of an intellectual is not to shape others' political will; it is, through the analysis that he carries out in his field, to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people's mental habits, the way they do and think things, to dissipate what is familiar and accepted, to reexamine rules and institutions and on the basis of this re-problematization (in which he carries out his specific task as an intellectual) to participate in the formation of a political will (in which he has his role as citizen to play).⁴⁵

⁴² D. Halperin, 'Historicizing the subject of desire: sexual preferences and erotic identities in the Pseudo-Lucianic *Erôtes*' in *Foucault and the Writing of History*, ed. J. Goldstein, Blackwell, Cambridge, 1994, p. 23.

⁴³ M. Cousins and A. Hussain, *Michel Foucault*, Macmillan, London, 1984, p. 3.

⁴⁴ G. C. Spivak, *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, Routledge, London, 1988, p. 4. For Foucault's discussion of the 'universal' and 'specific' intellectual see Foucault [1976], 'Truth and power' in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1980, pp. 126–31 (American edition: Pantheon, New York, 1980).

⁴⁵ Foucault [1984], 'The concern for truth' in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interview and Other Writings 1977–1984*, ed. L. D. Kritzman, Routledge, London and New York, 1988, p. 265.

The rejection of the ‘old prophetic function’ of the intellectual and Foucault’s own acknowledgement of the historical context and location of discursive practices makes Foucault’s work more amenable than most androcentric writers to feminist analysis. There is a certain paucity and openness in Foucault’s strategic operations that enables his work to avoid the constraints of dogmatic assertion. As well as recognising the value of such a position it is important to acknowledge the parameters and limitations of this living process of Foucault’s texts. It is necessary to appreciate what feminist standpoint theory identifies as the ‘material circumstances’ of Foucault’s writing. While feminist standpoint theory shares Foucault’s appreciation of the ‘contingent, partial and historically situated character’ of knowledge it significantly extends the rational framework to include the sex/gender dimension.⁴⁶ Reading Foucault from this position of feminist standpoint theory reinforces the ‘specificity’ of Foucault’s project. It allows us to read Foucault’s work on religion from the position of a white male writing from within the corridors of the French academic elite, but it also enables us to see that Foucault’s sexual orientation meant that he was not always (contrary to Nancy Hartsock’s belief) ‘with power’, meaning that he did not always understand the world from ‘the perspective of the ruling group’.⁴⁷

The attempt to locate Foucault’s work in the personal/political circumstances of his writing and take it outside of the ‘universal’ assumptions offers new ways of reading Foucault’s work on religion. I have attempted elsewhere to read Foucault’s avant-garde religious themes of sexuality and the death of God as related to specific issues of male sexuality.⁴⁸ Jerrold Seigel in an intriguing article has attempted to identify a ‘hidden level of homosexual reference in many of Foucault’s writings’ and following this line of thought Mark Vernon seeks to open a series of questions from within Foucault’s work for the emerging dialogue between queer theory and religion.⁴⁹ Foucault’s interest in the construction of the Other, of Same and Difference, his fascination with the nature of silence and his critique of the subject can all be read through his gay identity. Indeed Earl Jackson sees a direct link between the critique of the subject and the gay identity: ‘In this light, it seems neither accidental nor incidental that two very influential post-structuralist essays of the 1970’s, “What Is an Author?” and “The Death of the Author”, were written by gay men, Michel Foucault and Roland Barthes, respectively.’⁵⁰

⁴⁶ N. Hartsock, ‘The feminist standpoint: developing the ground for a specifically feminist historical materialism’ in *Discovering Reality*, ed. S. Harding and M. B. Hintikka, Reidel, Dordrecht, 1983, pp. 283ff., and N. Hartsock, ‘Foucault on power: a theory for women?’ in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, ed. L. G. Nicholson, Routledge, London, 1990, p. 158; Fraser and Nicholson, ‘Social criticism without philosophy: an encounter between feminism and postmodernism’ in *Feminism/Postmodernism*, p. 26.

⁴⁷ Hartsock, ‘Foucault on power’, p. 167. Many feminist writers have failed to appreciate the politics of sexual orientation.

⁴⁸ See Carrette, ‘Male theology in the bedroom’.

⁴⁹ J. Seigel, ‘Avoiding the subject: A Foucaultian itinerary’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 51, part 2, 1990, pp. 273–99; M. Vernon, ‘Following Foucault: the strategies of sexuality and the struggle to be different’, *Theology and Sexuality*, no. 5, September 1996, pp. 76–96. See Mark Vernon’s postscript in this volume.

⁵⁰ Jackson, *Strategies of Deviance*, p. 35.

I have already noted how David Halperin sees Foucault's work as central to the articulation of gay and lesbian sexuality, and his *Saint Foucault* stands as a passionate demonstration of how Foucault's work offers new possibilities for queer identity.⁵¹ These attempts to locate Foucault in the context of 'specific' struggles of his life are one response to the feminist challenge to Foucault. These readings however should not be seen as an excuse or as ways to ignore the tensions in Foucault's work but as part of those 'responsibly identified positions' of reading.

The feminist critique of Foucault extends and enriches Foucault's critical approach to religion and sexuality. It both contributes to and broadens the critical framework. As Foucault stated in 1977:

I dream of the intellectual who destroys evidence and generalities, the one who, in the inertias and constraints of the present time, locates and marks the weak points, the openings, the lines of force, who is incessantly on the move, doesn't know exactly where he is heading nor what he will think tomorrow for he is too attentive to the present; who, whenever he moves, contributes to posing the question of knowing whether the revolution is worth the trouble, and what kind (I mean, what revolution and what trouble), it being understood that the question can be answered only by those who are willing to risk their lives to bring it about.⁵²

If Foucault's project was about questioning and unsettling the intellectual certainties, the 'continual contestation' between Foucault and feminism must be part of the very 'Foucauldian' project of questioning and unsettling Foucault's work on religion.

Mystical illusions? Foucault, religion and biography

To be sure, bringing the words mystical, eroticism and atheism together attracts attention. (M. Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation* [1969] 1993, p. 202)

The examination of Foucault's work on religion has been limited. There have, as I indicated earlier, been a number of studies which have briefly examined specific theological and religious issues in relation to Foucault's work but they have failed to appreciate the full scope of Foucault's writings on religious and theological themes.⁵³ James Bernauer's initial invitation for theological engagement is still very much open and awaits some critical and creative dialogue. In the absence of any detailed assessment of Foucault's work on religion we have to rely on the partial and even distorted pictures of Foucault's religious engagement interlaced in the wider examinations of Foucault's life and work. In order to unravel the complexity of Foucault's religious thinking and to show how it has at times been misappropriated I

⁵¹ D. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995.

⁵² Foucault [1977], 'Power and sex' in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interview and Other Writings*, ed. L. D. Krizman, Routledge, London, 1988, p. 124.

⁵³ See, for example, A. MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, Duckworth, London, 1990; J. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1990, pp. 278ff; C. Davies, *Religion and the Making of Society: Essays in Social Theology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994. See also note 10 above.

want to examine the present biographical accounts⁵⁴ of Foucault's life in terms of their representation of Foucault's work on religion, focusing in particular on James Miller's 'narrative account'. This is particularly important given the way these studies have transformed Foucauldian scholarship in their examination of Foucault's wider intellectual and political context. The richness of these biographical studies has been highlighted by Kate Soper in her review of the literature and they provide useful registers for considering not only the significance of Foucault's work on religion but the ways this has at times been seriously misunderstood.⁵⁵

All of Foucault's biographers, to a greater or lesser extent, pick up the religious strands of Foucault's life and work, but with considerably different emphasis, style and orientation, creating a fragmented and varied picture of Foucault's religious concerns. The varied assessment of Foucault's writings on religious themes ranges from minor allusions in the first biography by Didier Eribon to what I shall show to be wild exaggerations and misrepresentation in the most controversial account by James Miller.⁵⁶ However the signposts of Foucault's interest in religion are documented more efficiently in David Macey's work. He refrains from marginalisation and excessive commentary by plotting the main features of Foucault's intellectual interest in theological and religious themes. The clear demarcation of religious themes in Macey confirms in this respect David Halperin's own assessment of the work as providing one of the best biographical studies: 'Macey's book can reasonably claim to be the single best source to date of complete and accurate information about Foucault's life'.⁵⁷ One of the particular strengths of David Macey's biography is the way it captures the political life of France and in consequence monitors the peripheral influence of the Catholic church in such affairs. The Catholic inheritance of many significant French intellectuals, including Foucault, is succinctly noted and the political and intellectual force of the church highlighted.⁵⁸ These social influences are not mere cosmetics, they reflect the importance of the church in France's social history and the influences which mark Foucault's historical documentation of psychiatry, medicine and the prison.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ D. Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, Faber & Faber, London, 1992 (American edition: Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991); Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*; and J. Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, Harper Collins, London, 1993.

⁵⁵ K. Soper, 'Ruling passion strong in death', *Radical Philosophy* 66, spring 1994, pp. 44–6.

⁵⁶ Eribon takes note of the Catholic context of Foucault's upbringing and notes in the general outline of his work a number of references to religious ideas. See Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, pp. 5; 7; 9; 11; 33; 35; 75; 78; 157; 217; 221; 254; 271; 273; 277; 285–91; 309–13; 317–24. I will discuss J. Miller, *The Passions of Michel Foucault*, in greater detail in this chapter.

⁵⁷ Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, p. 140.

⁵⁸ Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, pp. 24; 27; 64; 147; 192.

⁵⁹ All of Foucault's archaeological and genealogical studies identify aspects of church history in shaping contemporary thought and practice. See for example, Foucault [1961], *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, Routledge, London, 1991, pp. 241ff. (American edition: Pantheon, New York, 1965); and Foucault [1975], *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Penguin, London, 1991, p. 212 (American edition: Pantheon, New York, 1977). As Foucault stated in 1970: 'Religious discourse, juridical and therapeutic as well as, in some ways, political discourse are all barely dissociable from the functioning of a ritual that determines the individual properties and agreed roles of the speakers.' Foucault [1970], 'The discourse of language' in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Pantheon, New York, 1972, p. 225 (also Harper Colophon, New York, 1976; British edition: Routledge, London, 1989).

Macey's biography signposts the major religious contours of Foucault's work, from his work on religious experience in French literature in 1958, through his engagement with the literary avant-garde and the death of God, his interest in Islamic spirituality in Iran and Japanese Zen, and the final studies of religion and sexuality; a catalogue of engagements which remain unexamined in any detail.⁶⁰ Macey also uncovers the intriguing taped discussions Foucault had with the hitch-hiker Thierry Voeltzel in 1975. Although the printed version of these discussions, *Vingt ans et après*, is only a selection of transcripts, they do provide a rare glimpse into Foucault's attitudes to religion. (See 'On religion' in this volume.) The comments are brief and of little weight against his actual writings, but we learn about his fascination with religious ritual; an interest which in 1978 made him miss an interview in order to watch the installation of John Paul II on television.⁶¹

Macey's work also provides illuminating asides to wider religious issues by documenting intriguing episodes such as Maurice Clavel's reaction to Foucault's *The Order of Things*. Clavel, novelist, critic and teacher, who according to Macey had 'recently discovered a headily mystical Catholicism', had found in Foucault's work a confirmation of his faith. This is certainly surprising given that, as Macey also indicates, Foucault was an acknowledged atheist.⁶² Clavel's remarks however arose from a similar basis to those which fascinated Bernauer, the intrinsic relationship between God and 'man' in Foucault's work. Clavel was able to lecture on Foucault 'before the altar' because 'the man whose death was proclaimed in *Les mots et les choses* was "man without God"'.⁶³ This episode may be dismissed as a misconceived religious reading of Foucault by Clavel but what it does reveal is the significance of the theological material inside Foucault's texts. Foucault may have been an atheist but his interests led him to spend the final years of his life in the Bibliothèque du Saulchoir, a Dominican library, where his archive was preserved until 1997. Macey's work, without attempting any secondary analysis of the material, is thus able to demarcate the boundaries of Foucault's religious question by providing glimpses of a wider French Catholic interface to Foucault's life and work – the space for a theological examination is left open.

Where Macey and Eribon, as Halperin has noted, stop short of overt interpretative strategy, Miller's account reorganises and distorts the religious features.⁶⁴ While such an amplification may be beneficial in highlighting the importance of the religious content of Foucault's work, its failure lies in a lack of critical theological insight which can correctly position Foucault's work. The fundamental problem in Miller's reading of the religious content of Foucault's work, and also inadvertently of Bataille's work, is the way he retains the 'traditional attitudes' and religious perspectives which both suspend.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, pp. 80; 90; 99; 120; 138ff.; 256ff.; 416; 465.

⁶¹ Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, pp. 372-3. Cf. pp. xxi-xxii; 399; 406; 408; James Bernauer private interview, October 1995.

⁶² Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, pp. 192; 415.

⁶³ Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, p. 192.

⁶⁴ Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, p. 162, cf. pp. 142-3; 159.

⁶⁵ The idea that there is a problem of 'traditional attitudes' in reading Bataille is taken from M.-C. Lala, 'The conversions of writing in George Bataille' in *On Bataille: Yale French Studies*, no. 78, ed. A. Stoekl, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1990, p. 237.

Miller fails to appreciate the critical understanding of religious ideas employed by Foucault and instead builds a confusion of ideas in a fascination with the conjunction of mysticism, eroticism and atheism.⁶⁶ This distortion of religious ideas is part of a wider problem with Miller's 'narrative account' exposed by David Halperin.

Halperin's critique of Miller's work reveals the complications within the biographical accounts of Foucault in terms of his gay identity and the politics of homosexuality.⁶⁷ The force of Halperin's critique is directed to Miller's study in particular because of the way it misrepresents aspects of Foucault's life. Miller, he argues, assumes a 'privileged access to the "truth" of Foucault's psychopathology', selectively drawing out fragments of text, fabricating and interpolating passages and, finally, developing distorted interpretations about his life in terms of a preoccupation with death and sado-masochism.⁶⁸ The entire structure of Miller's biographical account is seen to operate on a 'normalising judgment' about Foucault's 'psychosexual being'.⁶⁹ Halperin's criticism is severe and brings into focus, from the position of gay politics, the way Foucault's life is 'reconstituted' according to a particular (straight) 'narrative'.⁷⁰

Halperin condenses his severely critical argument into a short incisive paper with a few striking examples. He is interested in the broader significance of Miller's biographical portrayal only in so far as it supports his central concerns about the 'politics of writing a gay life'.⁷¹ However, the stylisation of Foucault in Miller's work, to which Halperin is so opposed, unwittingly rests on a particular religious distortion of Foucault. Miller not only 'normalises' Foucault's psychosexual being, but builds into this portrayal a powerful religious iconography. The gay life is projected through a particular mystification of death, excess and the limit. Religious authority, in this sense, not only controls through its prohibition of gay sexuality but also enforces control by allowing certain experiences to exist as marginal. Religious authority has historically given voice to marginalised groups, such as women, who were denied access to the wider corridors of church power.⁷² Miller's demarcation of Foucault's gay experience as existing within a mystical framework is not, as it may appear, an affirmation, but a controlled mapping within a particular religious ideology.

Miller reads Foucault's religious ideas according to a popular 'normalisation' (a social construction which restricts, controls and limits practice and identity) of 'mystical experience' which in turn supports a sexual 'normalisation'. Although Halperin's use of the title *Saint Foucault* was an 'ironic appropriation' of his critics, the use of religious iconography is particularly significant given the sub-text of Miller's

⁶⁶ M. Blanchot [1969], *The Infinite Conversation*, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, 1993, p. 202.

⁶⁷ Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, pp. 126–85. Halperin's critique was originally published in *Salmagundi*, 1993, pp. 63–93.

⁶⁸ Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, pp. 164–5; 167.

⁶⁹ Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, p. 145.

⁷⁰ Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, p. 164.

⁷¹ Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, p. 137.

⁷² See Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*.

work – it sets up a tension between saint and mystic.⁷³ The idea of a ‘hagiography’ was also introduced into the debate by Alasdair MacIntyre, who saw Miller’s own work as a ‘secular hagiography’.⁷⁴ This demonstrates how religious ideas carry a weight and veracity in creating certain frameworks of value in the reading of Foucault’s work. By providing access to Foucault’s writings on religious themes it is possible to provide a critical context for such interpretations.

In order to understand the religious nature of Foucault’s work it is important to isolate and define the iconography which surrounds and informs the reading of his texts. It is necessary to separate the distorted images and ‘mysticalisation’ of Foucault from his actual texts and comments on religion. There is a multi-layered reading and reorganisation of religious ideas which demands careful scrutiny. The first task therefore is to extinguish the mystical iconography which clouds the religious understanding of Foucault’s work, a popularisation which revolves around the avant-garde and is turned back on Foucault. In this respect I want to examine Miller’s misrepresentation of Foucault in order to clear the ground for a more comprehensive consideration of Foucault’s religious question, which will indirectly support Halperin’s own critique of Miller’s portrayal of the gay life. I will spend some time examining Miller’s work, because it provides such a striking concoction of religious ideas which both confuses and obscures the nature of Foucault’s own writings on religion. Miller’s work forms a negative from which to draw out the central theoretical issues underpinning Foucault’s work on religion.

MILLER’S RELIGIOUS ICONOGRAPHY

In the postscript to his ‘narrative account’ of Foucault’s life, Miller acknowledges his fascination with the style of Foucault’s writing and a certain ‘aura’ in the works. Commenting on his reading of Foucault’s texts, Miller states: ‘Much of Foucault’s prose now seemed to me suffused with a strange kind of aura, both morbid and vaguely mystical.’⁷⁵ And, lecturing at Tokyo University in 1991 on the theme of his biography, he stated: ‘Besides being a master of a certain type of positive historiographic inquiry, he was, I believe, a kind of mystic – philosophically; sexually; politically.’⁷⁶ Miller defends his work by stating how he attempts to ‘evoke the color and mood of Foucault’s imaginative universe’.⁷⁷ He admits to using ‘interpretative techniques’ but the strands of imaginative interplay are never clearly articulated and oscillate around the text without any rigorous substantiation. There is some doubt in Miller’s mind as to whether he ‘was reading something into him [Foucault]’, but

⁷³ David Halperin, private discussion. ‘Saint Foucault’ was originally given as the title of David Halperin’s review of Didier Eribon’s biography in the *Lesbian and Gay Studies Newsletter*, vol. 19, no. 2, July 1992, pp. 32–5; reprinted from *Bryn Mawr Classical Review*, vol. 3, no. 2, 1992, pp. 104–9. The title ‘Saint Foucault’ also appeared in G. G. Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1987, pp. 220–35; 292–5. I am grateful to David Halperin for this brief genealogy of the term.

⁷⁴ A. MacIntyre, ‘Miller’s Foucault, Foucault’s Foucault’, *Salmagundi*, no. 97, winter 1993, p. 60.

⁷⁵ Miller, *The Passions of Michel Foucault*, p. 376.

⁷⁶ J. Miller, ‘Foucault’s politics in biographical perspective’, *Salmagundi*, no. 97, winter 1993, p. 42.

⁷⁷ J. Miller, ‘Policing discourse: a response to David Halperin’, *Salmagundi*, no. 97, winter 1993, p. 97.

'seduced by his literary style' Miller becomes immersed into a particular dimension of the work connected with death and cruelty.⁷⁸ Miller in this process indexed a whole series of 'recurrent images and motifs' in, he admits, his 'own crude way'.⁷⁹ In his postscript there is a clear admission of a presentation of Foucault based on a magnification of certain images. We discover at the end of the work how Miller had intuitively taken the notion of the 'vaguely mystical' and slowly built a whole religious iconography into the life and work of Foucault. Every tangential link with the idea of the 'mystical' is exploited, such as rewriting Foucault's reporting of the Iranian Revolution as reflecting 'his essentially mystical vision of politics as a "limit-experience"' and merging the discussion of Christian self-sacrifice with the mystical erotics of Bataille.⁸⁰

There is a whole series of ideas built into Miller's text which support and reinforce this mystical iconography. We find alongside the central ideas of the Nietzschean quest and the 'limit-experience', religious and occult terminology such as 'hermetic', 'esoteric', 'visionary', 'erotic ecstasy', 'ascetic' and even 'gnomic'; terms which would more freely be associated with Crowley, Gurdjieff and Jung than with Foucault.⁸¹ These ideas are not just passing metaphors, rather key imaginative reconstructions of Foucault's life and work in terms of a misreading and distorted emphasis of Foucault's religious texts and secondary influences.

Many assertions about the religious nature of Foucault are prefixed with the phrase 'a kind of'; Foucault is 'a kind of spiritual medium' and 'a kind of visionary', but most of Miller's iconography has no such weak escape clause.⁸² Miller reads the texts of Foucault that examine religion and the religious influences of the avant-garde as confirming a notion of the 'mystical' – but no detailed qualification is provided and Miller shows no sign of reading the texts of Christian 'mysticism' or any other 'mystical' tradition.⁸³ The seeds of distortion are sown and obscure religious ideas are planted in a landscape of sensation and effect; no doubt Foucault would again, to use his own dismissal of identity, be over there laughing.⁸⁴

In order to focus the many disparate strands of Miller's mystical reading of Foucault I want to organise my discussion around four interrelated areas: mysticism

⁷⁸ Miller, *The Passions of Michel Foucault*, pp. 376–7.

⁷⁹ Miller, *The Passions of Michel Foucault*, p. 376.

⁸⁰ Miller, *The Passions of Michel Foucault*, pp. 314; 324. With reference to 'mystical experience' and Iran see Miller, *The Passions of Michel Foucault*, pp. 306–7; 460 n.92; cf. Jambet [1989], 'The constitution of the subject and spiritual practice'.

⁸¹ There are a whole range of references to this terminology and I list the principal examples: Miller, *The Passions of Michel Foucault*: 'hermetic' pp. 7; 33; 124; 281; 294; 319; 335; 'esoteric' pp. 7; 88; 321; 'visionary' p. 8, cf. pp. 339 n.59; 445 n.122; 'erotic/ecstasy' pp. 72; 87–8; 154–5; 313; 319; 324; 'divine agony' p. 87; 'ascetic' pp. 334; 342; 344; 'gnomic' pp. 5; 318; 332; and, 'mystical' pp. 30; 88–9; 154; 279; 306–7; 314; 376.

⁸² Miller, *The Passions of Michel Foucault*, pp. 8; 118; 155; 162.

⁸³ As will already be apparent, the terms 'mysticism' and 'mystical' have a complex genealogy. See Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, and King, *Orientalism and Religion*, for a more detailed discussion of these terms. When I refer to these terms in relation to Miller I have in mind the modern stereotypical construction of intense psychological experiences, developed in the work of William James, which is distinct from, although related to, the varied use of the term in Christian history. See G. Jantzen, 'Mysticism and experience', *Religious Studies*, vol. 25, 1989, pp. 295–315.

⁸⁴ Foucault [1969]. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Routledge, London, 1991, p. 17.

and the ‘limit-experience’; sado-masochism and religious suffering; transgression and transcendence; Gnosticism and the occult. These four areas constitute the central theoretical operations underpinning Miller’s work which is developed from a mixture of theological naivety, popular misconception and a misreading of Foucault’s engagement with the religious themes of the avant-garde. It is through the writings of the avant-garde that Miller supported and enhanced the mystical reading, referring specifically to de Sade, Artaud, Bataille, Blanchot, Beckett and Char (Miller, chapters 3–4). These writings are then written across a description of sado-masochism, confirming the precarious way religious themes are imported from the avant-garde without any critical appreciation of theology or Foucault’s own work (Miller, chapters 8–10).

MYSTICISM AND THE ‘LIMIT-EXPERIENCE’

The mystical reading of Foucault’s life and work is built from an understanding of the notion of ‘limit-experience’, which in turn is grafted on to a spurious reading of mysticism. The idea of ‘limit-experience’ is in fact the central linchpin of Miller’s entire narrative work, forming the basis of reading Foucault and his life.

Foucault’s lifelong preoccupation with ‘experience’ and its limits thus represents more than a dramatic and sometimes disturbing aspect of one philosopher’s quest for truth: it also suggests a new way of looking at his major texts and assessing their significance; and of reexamining how a profound modern skeptic, avowedly ‘beyond good and evil’, handled the vocation of philosophy, the making of political commitments, and the shaping of a public ‘self’.⁸⁵

Miller develops the significance of the idea of ‘limit-experience’ from three sources: the foreword to the original 1961 edition of *Histoire de la folie*; the 1978 interview with the Italian journalist Duccio Trombadori; and a private meeting with Foucault’s partner Daniel Defert in 1990.⁸⁶ These fragmentary pieces are taken alongside the Nietzschean quest to formulate a ‘re-creation’ of Foucault’s inner ‘daimon’.⁸⁷ This is an interesting imaginative exercise and one which has certainly captured a level of public interest and popular appeal.⁸⁸ But whether it captures Foucault’s inner drive or whether it has any textual justification is another matter entirely. The desire to find a single motivating source of any great life is tempting; but, as many commentators have shown, such attempts at coherence in a thinker like Foucault contradict his entire enterprise.⁸⁹ To subsume Foucault’s lifelong attempt to understand and articulate his gay sexuality under the idea of ‘limit-experience’ is itself a reductive exercise which attempts to imprison a multifariously embodied living into a narrow conceptual

⁸⁵ Miller, *The Passions of Michel Foucault*, p. 32.

⁸⁶ Miller, *The Passions of Michel Foucault*, pp. 29–31; 380; 398–9 n.49, 52, 58.

⁸⁷ Miller, *The Passions of Michel Foucault*, p. 70.

⁸⁸ Miller’s work became the subject of a British television programme, and even though this programme began by mentioning the ‘three’ published biographies it discussed only Miller’s work. David Macey had been interviewed at length for the programme but no mention or footage of this appeared. The importance of Didier Eribon’s ground-breaking study was also never fully acknowledged. This is a clear demonstration of media sensation preceding academic validity and indicates the problems and dangers of Miller’s popular sensationalisation of Foucault’s sexuality. See ‘The Late Show’, BBC television, 1993.

⁸⁹ Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, pp. 127ff.

framework. Would Miller have done the same with the sexuality of a straight man? The inner motivations of Foucault's work will always lie in the realms of speculation and are certainly not reducible to a singular factor. These issues extend far beyond the domains of this enquiry; the more immediate concern here is how the idea of the 'limit-experience' forms the central basis for Miller's reading of Foucault's religious texts and how it is linked to the idea of mysticism.

Miller very quickly links the idea of 'limit-experience' with mysticism in the description of 'aspects of human existence that seemed to defy rational understanding' in Foucault's *Madness and Civilization*. The 'tormented vision of Goya', the 'cruel erotic fantasies of Sade' and the 'insane glossolalia of Artaud' are linked, not by Foucault but by Miller, to 'a mystical kind of experience'.⁹⁰ This association and preoccupation occurs throughout Miller's work and examples abound through the text. The idea of the 'limit-experience' becomes the nucleus around which to develop a series of ideas from the mysterious to the mystical, and the esoteric to the ecstatic, each a way of positioning and understanding Foucault's concerns about death, sexuality and the desire to think differently.

In the light of such incongruous associations with Foucault we may legitimately ask: how and why has this process of 'mysticalization' been devised in Miller's work? The answer to this resides in a confused reading of Foucault's religious texts, particularly in those essays from the 1960s. One of the strengths of Miller's work was to highlight the influences of the surrealist and avant-garde writers on Foucault and it is this emphasis which at times simultaneously distorts. In the writings of the avant-garde there were a number of religious and theological concerns used to disrupt the dominant rational order and re-create a sense of the 'sacred'. During what is known as his 'literary period', Foucault engaged with a number of these works, picking up a series of religious ideas. (See for example 'Preface to transgression' in this volume.) As I have stated elsewhere, Foucault created a fascinating theological sub-text through the encounter with the avant-garde, but this entry into the theological realm is very specific and there is no substantial textual evidence to support the view that Foucault regarded his work in any way as 'mystical'.⁹¹ There are, as Bernauer noted, a number of isolated comments on 'negative theology' but these were very specific and can in no way justify interpreting his entire works and experiences in a mystical framework. The key to Miller's mysticalisation of Foucault is a misreading of the 'limit-experience' and, as I will demonstrate, a hidden Jamesian notion of mysticism which operates behind Miller's text.

The idea of 'limit-experience' in Foucault's work is derived from the avant-garde writer Georges Bataille, who wrote a powerful essay on the experience of the 'impossible' and the 'unknown' which he entitled *Inner Experience*.⁹² The nature of Bataille's text is deliberately obfuscating and it weaves together a number of experiences which it simultaneously suspends, such as laughter, ecstasy, poetry and eroticism, in order to reach a realm of 'unknowing', a place which shatters the

⁹⁰ Miller, *The Passions of Michel Foucault*, p. 30.

⁹¹ Carrette, 'Male theology in the bedroom'.

⁹² G. Bataille [1954], *Inner Experience*, SUNY, New York, 1988, pp. 3; 12–13; 39; 137.

'known'. Bataille with great intensity and struggle attempts to create an indefinable space utilising the familiar 'known' in order to postulate an 'unknown', to reach what is uncontrollable. It seeks through 'torment' and 'anguish' to break the boundaries of 'ordinary' knowing in order to reach a space of 'non-knowledge', an 'inaccessible unknown'.⁹³ 'I wanted experience to lead where it would, not to lead it to some end point given in advance. And I say at once that it leads to no harbour (but to a place of bewilderment, of nonsense).'⁹⁴

Bataille makes the point in his study that what he designates as 'inner experience', the elusive point of the impossible and non-knowledge, is understood by what 'one usually calls "mystical experience": the states of ecstasy, of rapture, at least of meditated emotion'.⁹⁵ The 'mystical' certainly informs Bataille's study and he refers to such paradigm 'mystics' as Eckhart, St John of the Cross and St Ignatius, but to presume that Bataille's idea of 'inner experience' is referring to a history of Christian mysticism (whichever way this may be defined) or a stereotypical mystical experience is to misunderstand the complexity of Bataille's work.⁹⁶

Bataille explicitly uses a mystical frame of reference in order to suspend it; it is a useful arena of experience to point towards his idea of 'inner experience'. He borrows the ideas of mysticism in order to grasp an 'experience laid bare, free of ties, even of origin'.⁹⁷ In fact he does not like the word mysticism because, as he rightly assumes, it is difficult to use without 'inviting confusion'.⁹⁸ Bataille entertains but specifically rejects experiences like mysticism because they are formed by predetermined religious and theological ideas.⁹⁹

There is a specific rejection of the theological in Bataille, his work *Inner Experience* forming part of his three-volume 'La somme athéologique'.¹⁰⁰ Christian mystical experience for Bataille is formed and constructed in relation to known objects and beliefs, it holds theological presuppositions and can be seen as a 'fiction' and 'art'.¹⁰¹ There is a distinct process of valuing certain experiences which have theological validity and then discarding them as inadequate. 'God', according to Bataille, 'differs from the unknown'.¹⁰² In this sense Bataille regards his work, alongside that of Blanchot, as offering a 'new theology' of the 'unknown'.¹⁰³ This rejection of Christian mysticism

⁹³ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, p. 179.

⁹⁴ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, p. 3.

⁹⁵ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, p. 3.

⁹⁶ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, pp. 4; 12; 47; 119. I am here making a distinction between a broad collection of thinkers in the Christian tradition located under the term 'mystical' and the modern psychological reconstruction of this tradition in the work of William James.

⁹⁷ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, p. 3.

⁹⁸ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, p. 174.

⁹⁹ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, p. 175. As Bataille states: 'A "mystic" sees what he wants – this depends on powers which are relative. And in the same way, he discovers – what he knew. No doubt there are wills, beliefs which are unequally favourable, but as such [man?] experience introduces nothing which has not at first been a part of one's understanding – if not the contestation of understanding as the origin of beliefs.'

¹⁰⁰ Bataille's 'La somme athéologique' consisted of *On Nietzsche* [1945], Paragon House, New York, 1992; *Inner Experience* [1954], SUNY, New York, 1988; and *Guilty* [1961], Lapis Press, California, 1988.

¹⁰¹ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, pp. 4-5; 73

¹⁰² Bataille, *Inner Experience*, p. 5.

¹⁰³ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, p. 102; Cf. M. Blanchot [1950], *Thomas the Obscure* (*New Version*), Davis Lewis, New York, 1973; and N. Greene, 'Thomas, come back', *Novel*, vol. 8, no. 2, winter 1975, pp. 175-7.

by Bataille is clearly supported by Richardson in his discussion of Bataille's work:

While Bataille's experience is entirely framed by Western concepts and he does retain some of the terminology of Christian mysticism, nevertheless there can be no doubt that the experience he conveys has nothing to do with union with a transcendent God ... As such it certainly goes beyond anything that is proper to Western mysticism.¹⁰⁴

Bataille's complex exploration at the 'limits' of thought and experience brushes up against a series of ideas in recent scholarship on mysticism initiated by Katz, who examines whether it is possible to have 'raw experience' unmediated by culture and tradition.¹⁰⁵ Katz and others have tried to ascertain whether mystical experience exists outside the historical and social traditions of a particular religion in a similar way that Bataille is trying to point to an 'inner experience' outside the categories of mysticism. Foucault's own work on the social construction of experience would not support any idea of 'raw experience', but the desire to push the boundaries of social identity and reshape the self is very much in support of Bataille's project. Bataille's struggle is to break the confines of thinking and 'experience' the 'ungraspable', the 'extreme limit of the possible'.¹⁰⁶ Bataille is wrestling with the tortuous limits and suffering found in human life and the desire to extend beyond it. The central notion behind this work for Foucault, in his own essay on Bataille, is 'contestation', a concept Bataille takes over from Blanchot.¹⁰⁷ As Bataille explains: 'inner experience is linked to the necessity, for the mind, of putting everything into question – without any conceivable respite or rest.'¹⁰⁸ The idea of limit and transgression has currency for Foucault in terms of his anti-humanist stance and the attempt to suspend the categories of Enlightenment thought. It was Bataille, along with Blanchot and Klossowski, who enabled Foucault to break with the traditional philosophy of the subject.¹⁰⁹ Foucault carries forward the force of 'contestation' in his own questioning of the idea of 'man' and the 'subject', but this does not lead to a state of mystical rapture, which would be to fall back into the traditional categories of theological authority, and, as occurs in Miller's work, psychological individualism.

Foucault's post-structuralist spirit utilises the 'contestation' of Bataille and Blanchot to push the boundaries of thought. Such thinkers support Foucault's radical vision and it is not surprising that every reference to the concept of 'limit-experience' in his 1978 interview with Trombadori is couched in terms of the reorganisation of

¹⁰⁴ M. Richardson, *Georges Bataille*, Routledge, London, 1994, p. 113. cf. pp. 112–16. Richardson points out that to see Bataille's thinking as 'mystical' is 'misconceived'. See M. Richardson, 'Introduction' in *The Absence of Myth: Writings on Surrealism by George Bataille*, ed. M. Richardson, Verso, London, 1994, pp. 18; 20f. Cf. G. Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927–1939*, Minneapolis, University of Minneapolis, 1985, p. 236 and N. Calas (1945), 'Acephalic mysticism' in *Transfigurations: Art Critical Essays in the Modern Period*, UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, 1985.

¹⁰⁵ See S. T. Katz, ed., *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, Sheldon, London, 1978.

¹⁰⁶ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, p. 37.

¹⁰⁷ Foucault [1963], 'A preface to transgression' in this volume, p. 61 n. 13. Cf. Foucault [1966], 'Maurice Blanchot: the thought from the outside', p. 22.

¹⁰⁸ Bataille, *Inner Experience*, p. 175. Cf. Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, p. 202ff.

¹⁰⁹ Foucault [1978], *Remarks on Marx*, Semiotext(e), New York, 1991, pp. 31; 40–1; 46; 52; 56–8; 68–9; 70–1. Cf. Foucault [1980], 'About the beginning of the hermeneutics of the self' in this volume, p. 160.

knowledge and the deconstruction of the subject; ideas which specifically offered Foucault a way out of the traditional philosophy of the subject. As Foucault makes clear:

And then in Bataille, the theme of the 'limit-experience' in which the subject reaches decomposition, leaves itself, at the limits of its own impossibility. All that had an essential value for me. It was the way out, the chance to free myself from certain traditional philosophical binds.¹¹⁰

The notion of 'limit-experience', irrespective of its place and meaning in Bataille, inspired the wider operation of 'de-subjectifying' Western thought. It was an attempt to step outside the experience of the 'subject', to write, to articulate and to think without the 'subject'.¹¹¹ Madness, death, sexuality and crime were all examined in terms of breaking the 'limits' of preconceived rationality and subjective orientation, and not as an inner mystical event.¹¹² At no point does Foucault make a direct association of the 'limit-experience' with mysticism, which remains a strategy of Bataille's argument. To read Bataille's mystical analogies back into Foucault's life and work, as Miller does, is to distort the evidence.

Miller's work on the 'limit-experience' misreads both Bataille and Foucault by translating the term into a contemporary psychological event, which as Grace Jantzen's study on mystical experience reveals is developed from a Jamesian interpretation of mysticism.¹¹³ Jantzen exposes the way modern interpretations of mysticism are seen as 'subjective psychological states or feelings of the individual', a position she sees as emerging from an over-reliance in contemporary thought on William James's definition of mysticism in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

William James, according to Jantzen, built his idea of mysticism from the Romantic tradition of Schelling and Schleiermacher, emphasising the qualities of intense ineffable experience.¹¹⁴ This position was in turn a response to Kant's critical philosophy which prevented any rational understanding of God. While aware of a broad range of mystical experiences James was, as Jantzen indicates, 'drawn to these fringes of experience' in order to 'circumvent Kantian strictures on the experience of the supernatural'.¹¹⁵ In his turn Miller falls into this reading of the mystical in his own focus on the 'limit-experiences' and in the process presents a confused understanding of Foucault. What is perhaps more intriguing is that Miller's reliance on a post-Kantian mysticism is circumvented by Foucault in his own essay on Bataille.

Foucault recognises that the idea of the 'limit' comes from Kant's reflections on metaphysical discourse, but he also acknowledges that such an opening was simultaneously closed when Kant 'relegated all critical investigations to an anthropological

¹¹⁰ Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*, p. 48.

¹¹¹ Foucault, 'A preface to transgression', pp. 65–6.

¹¹² Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*, pp. 99–100.

¹¹³ See Jantzen, 'Mysticism and experience'.

¹¹⁴ Jantzen, 'Mysticism and experience', pp. 298–9; cf. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, pp. 278ff.

¹¹⁵ Jantzen, 'Mysticism and experience', p. 302; cf. I. Kant [1793], *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1960 and W. James [1901–2], *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Collins, Glasgow, 1960.

question'.¹¹⁶ Foucault relies on Nietzsche, and those post-Nietzschean thinkers like Bataille, to break the anthropological subject. There is a tension in Miller – noted in passing by Alasdair MacIntyre in his own critique – between Nietzsche's project and the 'cult of extreme experiences with its roots in nineteenth century romanticism'.¹¹⁷ Miller misunderstands Foucault and mysticism by his failure to see beyond a post-Kantian anthropology.

Miller not only misreads Bataille's understanding of the 'inner experience' and Foucault's understanding of Bataille but he also injects a Romantic notion of mysticism developed by James to support his narrative. It would even be possible to say that Miller's underlying 'passion' is to read (perhaps unconsciously) Foucault and his life through the intellectual climate of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, through the 'extreme experiences' which for Miller are psychological and religious.¹¹⁸ Such confusions in reading the works of Foucault as mystical demand greater scrutiny of his religious texts and expose the need to understand the religious nature of French avant-garde writing.

Miller's work has obviously dominated a lot of current interest in Foucault. However, the value of Miller's work is not in presenting an accurate understanding of Foucault, but in allowing greater exposure to some intriguing details of Foucault's work. (Miller's research if not accurate is prolific.) Miller in effect sets the 'mystical' cat among the 'religious' pigeons. It is up to those who follow to reorganise Foucault against the backdrop of Miller's fanciful narrative. This narrative has twisted the writings of avant-garde writers, such as Bataille, to substantiate a preconceived idea about Foucault's work. In order to extinguish the religious distortions in Miller's work I want to follow three less dominant, but none the less significant, strands of Miller's 'mysticalization', the first two of which are linked directly to the idea of 'limit-experience'.

SADO-MASOCHISM AND RELIGIOUS SUFFERING

In his critique of Miller's work Halperin warns the reader to 'check Miller's quotations of Foucault against their original contexts', a procedure particularly necessary in the light of the 'extraordinary critical acrobatics' and the 'frenetic orgy of citations'.¹¹⁹ This becomes most acute in relation to Miller's account of sado-masochism (S/M) and the way he links this to mystical and ecstatic experience. The pleasure from

¹¹⁶ Foucault, 'A preface to transgression', p. 63.

¹¹⁷ A. MacIntyre, 'Miller's Foucault, Foucault's Foucault', p. 56.

¹¹⁸ I am not suggesting that Miller is developing his idea of mysticism directly from William James. He provides no genealogy for his use of the term. It would be more reasonable to assume that Miller's stereotypical notion of the mystical is derived from the popular culture of the 1960s that operated on, absorbed and developed notions of mysticism reconstructed through a psychological discourse, which goes back to William James. See, for example, the popular literature, influencing and arising from the 1960s, such as A. Huxley [1954; 1956], *The Doors of Perception; Heaven and Hell*, Granada, London, 1977 and A. Maslow [1964], *Religions, Values and Peak-experiences*, Penguin, New York, 1970.

¹¹⁹ Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, pp. 172; 167; 181. Miller in response to Halperin's critique acknowledged the importance of his footnotes to allow readers to make their own judgement. While Miller's footnotes and sources are substantial, the utilisation of the material, as Halperin has clearly identified, is spurious. Miller, 'Policing discourse', pp. 94–9.

physical pain in martyrdom or religious suffering and S/M opens a vast area of study, and, while it is not in question that at some level they may constitute a parallel event and hold a common denominator in the suffering body, there are huge epistemological quandaries in understanding the so-called 'limit-experience' of S/M as religious. What is erotic is not necessarily religious and vice versa, and whereas it may be just a question of definitions, the context and belief behind a particular infliction of pain on the body is surely crucially important.¹²⁰

Miller continually amalgamates themes in Foucault's writing with religious ideas of self-sacrifice and martyrdom; for example, he takes Foucault's desire to obliterate identity, the 'shattering of the philosophical subject', the death of the author and Foucault's interest in St Anthony in order to position the experience of S/M within a mystical framework.¹²¹ Miller fails to appreciate the different order of these experiences and face the central fact that activities in S/M are not acts of missionary zeal, a desire to die for Christ, or attempts to find union with God in any specific theological sense. There are also huge social and political differences in the conception of suffering in the Californian bathhouses and that of religious martyrs of the Middle Ages, and to suggest that Foucault understood his own experience theologically is seriously to misread his work on religion. The question remains as to how Miller formulates such a misconstrued argument.

Once again the central confusion arises from Miller's misreading of Foucault through Bataille, this time principally through his later study, *Eroticism*. In this work Bataille makes a clear link between erotic experiences and mysticism. They hold a 'structural' similarity in the sense of creating a feeling of continuity in a state of discontinuity.¹²² Foucault is fully aware of this discussion and confirms the link between Christian mysticism and spirituality to sexuality.¹²³ The link between Christian experience and sexuality forms a central part of Foucault's engagement with religion, and his *History of Sexuality* is underpinned by such a discussion of Christian history. (See Part 3 in this volume.) The fact that Foucault develops a fascinating study

¹²⁰ See E. Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1985. There is an interesting anomaly related to this mixture of discourses when we consider the original location of the Foucault archive in the Dominican library, the Bibliothèque du Saulchoir. St Dominic, in his identification with Christ, idealised, with so many of his time, the state of martyrdom and suffering. He wrote with passion: 'Do not offer me a swift death, I beg you, but rather tear off my limbs one by one – I should wish to be no more than a limbless trunk, eyes torn out, rolling in my own blood that I might conquer a more beautiful crown of martyrdom' (from Jourain de Saxe (1891), *Opéra*, Fribourg, p. 549, quoted in Zoé Oldenbourg, *Le Bûcher de Montségur*, Gallimard, Paris, 1959, p. 97). These words of St Dominic parallel the opening passages of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, and form an intriguing connections with S/M, but the epistemology and hermeneutics of suffering in each case operates at an entirely different level. Dominic's experiences in the thirteenth century is set around the politics of the Inquisition and a religious understanding of dying for Christ; this is not the same as the politics of punishment in the eighteenth century or the erotics of twentieth-century gay bathhouses. The simple linking by Miller of these events gives no consideration to their social location and is cause for much distortion. Similarly, although Miller correctly notes Foucault's interest in St Anthony and the images of suffering, there is no evidence to suggest that Foucault equates this with S/M. See Miller, *The Passions of Michel Foucault*, pp. 341–4. (I am grateful to Richard Townsend for providing the example of St Dominic.)

¹²¹ Miller, *The Passions of Michel Foucault*, pp. 30; 324; 342–4.

¹²² G. Bataille [1957], *Eroticism*, Marion Boyars, London, 1987, p. 15.

¹²³ Foucault, 'Preface to transgression', p. 57.

of religious ideas and sexuality is not under question; what is questioned is the view that Foucault saw modern sexuality as being linked to the idea of mysticism.

The crucial fact is that Foucault makes a distinction between the shaping of sexuality in Christian history and modern sexuality. Modern sexuality from Sade to Freud has not according to Foucault ‘found the language of it logic or of its natural process’, it exists in an ‘empty zone’, at the site of a ‘dead God’.¹²⁴ Modern sexuality is a post-theological position, it inherits Christian models of the flesh but is not Christian or mystical. These are fundamental ideas in Foucault’s religious sub-text and they offer little support to a view of contemporary sado-masochistic experience as constituting a mystical or religious event. It is important to remember that Foucault makes a clear division between the Christian heritage of sexuality and the modern sexual condition, sufficient evidence to show it is unlikely that Foucault would have seen his own experience of S/M as specifically Christian, let alone Christian mystical.

In his own discussion of S/M in 1984 Foucault saw S/M as the ‘eroticization of power’, it held ‘new possibilities of pleasure’. There was no hint of any Christian or mystical experience in Foucault’s words. More importantly, Foucault recognised S/M as the ““use” of a strategic relationship’ not before sex (as in heterosexual relationships) but ‘inside sex’. Foucault even points out in passing that while the institution of courtly love in the Middle Ages held a strategic relationship (to God) it remained outside the sexual act. Although Foucault does not mention religious suffering in his discussion of S/M it can, according to his own analysis, be seen as a ‘strategic relationship’ to God and oneself which may create pleasure but which does not necessarily operate within sex.¹²⁵ The S/M relationship exists inside a hermeneutics of sexual pleasure rather than a theology of suffering.

It soon becomes clear that Miller’s argument links erotic and sexually ecstatic events to the notion of ‘limit-experience’ as a way of justifying the mystical dimension, which as we have seen holds no textual support.¹²⁶ Foucault’s texts are reconstituted by Miller in terms of Bataille’s account of mystical experience and eroticism and show no appreciation of the shifts in direction and changes of emphasis that take place in Foucault’s own reflections. Miller uses the enigmatic nature of Foucault’s writing to insert his own reconstructions, by placing Bataille’s account of mystical rapture and erotic behaviour alongside ‘typically oblique’ passages from Foucault; Miller thus creates a false religious atmosphere out of Foucault’s own understanding of S/M.¹²⁷ Foucault may have taken his experience in California as ‘limit-experiences’ as Daniel Defert suggested to Miller, but, as I have shown, Foucault did not take such ‘limit-experiences’ as ‘mystical’. The continual compounding of misinformation builds huge fantasies; fantasies Halperin believes to be Miller’s own.¹²⁸

¹²⁴ Foucault, ‘Preface to transgression’, p. 57.

¹²⁵ Foucault [1982], ‘Michel Foucault: an interview: sex, power and the politics of identity’, *The Advocate*, no. 400, 7 August 1984, pp. 27–30. Cf. Foucault [1982], ‘The social triumph of the sexual will’, *Christopher Street*, no. 64, May 1982, pp. 36–41.

¹²⁶ Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, pp. 87–8; 154–5; 278–9.

¹²⁷ Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, pp. 88–9. Cf. Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, p. 168.

¹²⁸ Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, p. 181.

The mysticalisation of Foucault and the erotic is given extra weight by Miller when he uses the key passage on ‘negative theology’ from Foucault’s essay on Blanchot to magnify his narrative. Foucault’s essay on Blanchot examines the idea of ‘the thought from the outside’, and Foucault suggests this type of thinking may be linked to the mystical writings of Pseudo-Dionysius.¹²⁹ This 1966 allusion has been completely misunderstood by Miller. What Miller fails to realise is that Foucault, like Bataille before, suspends the mystical idea as soon as it is introduced. Foucault and Bataille are attempting to demarcate a new space in literature with inadequate old language. Miller provides no context for Foucault’s remarks and introduces ‘a kind of mystical thinking’ into the modern period inaugurated by Sade. Foucault holds no such position and only indicates how Sade ‘gives voice to the nakedness of desire as the lawless law of the world’; no ‘kind of mystical thinking’ is implied.¹³⁰

Miller’s technique is to extrapolate any possible fragments from Foucault’s work, or from influential writers related to Foucault, to support a process of mysticalisation. This can be seen in the way Miller interjects Deleuze’s idea of ‘perverse mysticism’ into his Sadeian recreation of S/M, a passage which Halperin believes shows no real understanding of the practices of gay bathhouses.¹³¹ Miller also shows no real appreciation of Deleuze’s idea of ‘perverse mysticism’, which exists in a very specific discussion of the historical influences on the writings of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, the writer from whom Krafft-Ebing invented the pathology of ‘masochism’. Deleuze believes Masoch to have been ‘treated unjustly’ because his work was neglected while his name ‘passed into current usage’.¹³² Miller commits a similar injustice to both Masoch and Foucault, neglecting Foucault’s writing for the popular fascination with gurus, icons and erotics.

TRANSGRESSION AND TRANSCENDENCE

In the process of Miller’s iconography there is a significant interplay and slippage between the ideas of transformation, transgression and transcendence which supports his distortion of Foucault. The religious cosmology is stimulated by interweaving these terms and performing some intricate (possibly unconscious) linguistic juggling in order to allow sufficient ambiguity to create a religious space in Foucault’s writing, a strategy reinforced by fusing ‘transcendence’ with the ‘limit-experience’.

Miller accurately registers Foucault’s interest in personal transformation, a theme which emerges in the 1978 Trombadori interview, a text crucial to Miller’s narrative.¹³³ Foucault continually tried to hide his private self and attempted to escape classification; he wanted to step outside of the normalising categories of the ‘subject’. This desire to ‘shatter the philosophical subject’ and write from the place of the death of the author does provide a framework for considering Foucault’s attempt to make ‘transformations’ both intellectual and personal. Klossowski, according to Macey, saw Foucault’s

¹²⁹ Foucault, ‘Maurice Blanchot’, p. 16.

¹³⁰ Foucault, ‘Maurice Blanchot’, p. 17.

¹³¹ Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, pp. 279–80; Halperin, *Saint Foucault*, pp. 181–2.

¹³² G. Deleuze [1967], *Masochism*, Zone Books, New York, 1991, p. 13.

¹³³ Foucault, *Remarks on Marx*, p. 37; Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, p. 32.

goal, with Deleuze, as ‘the liquidation of the principle of identity’.¹³⁴ The confusion arises when Miller links this to a religious transcendence, as opposed to a self-transcendence, in his concept of the ‘limit-experience’.¹³⁵

The complication in Miller’s work occurs when he introduces Heidegger’s idea of “transcends” pure and simple and aligns it with Foucault’s idea of ‘transgression’.¹³⁶ This marriage of ideas escalates rapidly when sado-masochism is seen to ‘illuminate the enigma of transcendence’ and when ‘the object of transgression’ is viewed as being able to ‘tap the untamed energy of transcendence’.¹³⁷ A very simplistic metaphysical structure is being developed here by Miller and it shows no respect for the infinite complexities in this terminology. The cacophony is increased when Miller advances a strange litany of figures in his ‘transcendent’ musical; Kant’s ‘freedom’ and Nietzsche’s ‘will to power’ join with Heidegger to mark out the space of transcendence.¹³⁸ The noise is unbearable and the reader is left deafened in any attempt to ascertain the meaning, especially when these ideas are all linked to ‘a mysterious (and perhaps divine) spark within’.¹³⁹

It would seem that Miller’s narrative forms an unintended intellectual mockery of Foucault and Western philosophy, but, inaccurate as it is, it does allow us to draw attention to a central problem in understanding the idea of ‘transcendence’ in Foucault and its relationship to ‘transgression’.¹⁴⁰ This is brought further into focus when Miller in two footnotes explains that he translates the French word *franchissement* in Foucault’s 1983 essay on Kant’s ‘What is Enlightenment?’ as ‘transcendence’, rather than following Catherine Porter’s translation in *The Foucault Reader* of ‘transgression’.¹⁴¹ Miller justifies his decision to alter the translation on the grounds that after criticising Bataille in his 1976 *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* he stopped using the French word ‘transgression’. Miller may be correct to question the use of the word ‘transgression’, despite the fact that it remains faithful to the spirit of Foucault’s work, but Miller’s use of the word ‘transcendence’ is equally problematic.

The introduction of the word ‘transcendence’ into an essay offering alternative methods to Kant’s ‘transcendental’ opens up the danger, as we have already seen in Miller’s symphony, of confusing ‘transcendental’ (a Kantian mode of argumentation) with ‘transcendence’ (primarily a religious notion).¹⁴² The situation is complicated by a certain amount of slippage between these terms in Foucault as well, but what is clear is that through the historical processes Foucault challenged both the ‘transcend-

¹³⁴ Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, p. xv.

¹³⁵ Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, pp. 13ff.

¹³⁶ Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, pp. 46; 88; 143.

¹³⁷ Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, pp. 88; 143.

¹³⁸ Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, p. 305; cf. pp. 105; 116.

¹³⁹ Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, p. 348.

¹⁴⁰ See Carrette and King’s discussion of ‘transcendence’ in J. Carrette and R. King, ‘Giving “birth” to theory: critical perspectives on religion and the body’, *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies*, Special Edition, ‘Beginning with birth’, vol. 19, no. 1, spring 1998, pp. 123–43.

¹⁴¹ Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, pp. 445 n.124; 456 n.45. Cf. Foucault (1983), ‘What is Enlightenment?’ in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow, Penguin, London and New York, 1991, p. 45.

¹⁴² Foucault, ‘What is Enlightenment?’, p. 46; Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, p. 88; Foucault, ‘A preface to transgression’, p. 62.

ental' and the idea of 'transcendence'. While the confusion may be apparent, his challenge to these ways of thinking is not, as Foucault defending his archaeological method in 1969 states: 'But because it seemed to me that, for the moment, the essential task was to free the history of thought from its subjection to transcendence.' And later in the same paragraph: 'My aim was to cleanse it [history] of all transcendental narcissism.'¹⁴³ In order to avoid these complications the translation of *franchissement* should perhaps have retained the more literal sense of a 'crossing over', specifically as Foucault could have used the words 'transgression' or 'transcendence' (the same in French and English) if he had wanted to be precise. I do not wish to place too much emphasis on this particular text and its translation, but it serves to demonstrate how easily the slippage in terminology can occur, particularly in the light of Miller's religious iconography.

Foucault's thinking on the 'transcendent' exists in a complex trajectory of philosophical thought arising from Kojève's lecture on Hegel and Nietzschean avant-garde thought. Miller's work only demonstrates the misleading results of an uncritical use of this term, hovering between a general idea of 'self-transcendence/transformation' and a more theological notion, which he then interchanges with 'transgression'. The discussion of these problems is made more complex by a Gnostic reading of Klossowski, yet another idea Miller imports into Foucault.

GNOSTICISM AND THE OCCULT

The linking of Foucault's thought with the occult and Gnosticism is perhaps one of the most intriguing and fascinating strands of Miller's narrative, the meaning of which is often concealed in footnotes and brief allusions. As is the case with other areas of Miller's work, he is correct to identify Gnostic influences in the work of the avant-garde and surrealism, but totally inaccurate in assuming that this is carried forward in any significant way in Foucault's own understanding.

The principle force behind Miller's narrative was to see Foucault as engaging in a 'hermetic quest' according to Nietzsche's 'gnomic injunction "to become what one is"'.¹⁴⁴ The hermetic mystery seems to be supported by Miller's response to Foucault's style, which can be seen from the way he links a 'hermetic impulse' to his discussion of Roussel and perceives a 'hermetic abstractness' in his earlier works such as *The Order of Things*.¹⁴⁵ The use of the word 'hermetic' may have been a useful metaphor to describe the deliberately oblique styles and poetical ellipses Foucault inherited from avant-garde discourse, but when Miller also refers to the 'occult' in regard to Foucault's work, such descriptions take on an entirely different meaning and begin to form part of the sophisticated tapestry of Miller's underlying mysticalisation of Foucault.

The hermetic quest forms part of a seemingly innocent smattering of terms from 'occult' literature, including 'esoteric', 'visionary' and 'ascetic'.¹⁴⁶ The misuse of these

¹⁴³ Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 203; cf. Foucault [1972], 'An historian of culture' in Foucault Live: *Collected Interviews, 1961–1984*, 2nd edition, ed. S. Lotringer, Semiotext(e), New York, 1996, p. 99.

¹⁴⁴ Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, pp. 5; 319.

¹⁴⁵ Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, pp. 33; 124; cf. pp. 281; 294; 335; 348.

¹⁴⁶ Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, pp. 7; 8; 88; 321; 342; 344. cf. pp. 399 n.59; 445 n.122.

terms to create an occult visionary out of Foucault is exposed when Miller makes a few passing remarks to the ‘occult’, a word, it should be added, which is left precariously to drift in the text without definition or any substantiation. Miller sees the end of Foucault’s History of Sexuality Volume One, presumably the essay entitled ‘Right of death and power over life’, as holding ‘occult possibilities’ in the sense of the erotic pleasure of death and violence, a view he associates with Foucault’s own S/M practice.¹⁴⁷ There is no evidence to suggest that Foucault viewed his S/M practices in ‘occult’ terms and we can conclude only that this forms part of the wider wave of distortion operating throughout Miller’s fantasy. Miller seems to use the word ‘occult’ merely to signify an assumed erotic pleasure of sacrifice and shows no appreciation of the very diverse historical and social practices which have been labelled as ‘occult’; it forms a kind of literary strategy to cause sensation. This is precisely the force behind Halperin’s critique of Miller: gay sexual practices are sensationalised and wrapped in an elaborate and esoteric language so as to divorce them from the more immediate pleasures of gay men erotically losing control. Miller’s (straight) narrative is able to contain Foucault’s sexuality in terms which have no, or at least very little, relationship to Foucault’s own work.

Foucault did write about the themes of witchcraft, the devil and Gnosticism in the early 1960s, but specifically in terms of the history of madness and the work of Pierre Klossowski.¹⁴⁸ The essay on Klossowski directly discusses aspects of Gnosticism, a theme which sits alongside that of the occult and forms according to Miller ‘an unspoken subtext’ to his interpretation of ‘Foucault’s peculiar brand of “asceticism”’.¹⁴⁹ Miller argues, in a fascinating footnote, that Foucault has a ‘subterranean link, via his affinities with Klossowski, to a Manichean Gnosticism’.¹⁵⁰ And, commenting on Foucault’s discussion of St Anthony in a similar context, Miller writes:

As should be clear by now, I take ‘all’ of Foucault’s work to be an effort to issue a license for exploring this ‘daimonic’ possibility – and also as a vehicle for expressing, ‘fictively’, his own Nietzschean understanding of this harrowing vision of a gnosis beyond good and evil, glimpsed at the limits of experience.¹⁵¹

The final strand of Miller’s mysticalisation of Foucault is completed with the alignment of Foucault with Gnosticism.

The Gnostic nature of Foucault’s work is never really developed fully by Miller and largely remains, as he stated, his own ‘unspoken subtext’. The ‘unspoken subtext’ in Miller’s work appears to be focused on an interpretation of Foucault’s 1980 Howison lectures concerned with Christian self-sacrifice, coupled with some residue of Foucault’s 1963 essay on Klossowski. As Miller flamboyantly writes: ‘Testing the soul like a moneychanger tested gold in a fire, the Christian ascetic struggled with a diabolical double, conjuring up this demonic other in order to defeat and drive out,

¹⁴⁷ Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, pp. 279; 348. Cf. p. 304.

¹⁴⁸ Foucault [1962/8], ‘Religious deviations and medical knowledge’, and Foucault [1964], ‘The prose of Actaeon’, both in this volume.

¹⁴⁹ Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, p. 445 n.129.

¹⁵⁰ Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*.

¹⁵¹ Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, pp. 458–9 n.73.

through a kind of spiritual combat, this despicable self.¹⁵² The Gnostic language is Miller's devised by joining Foucault's description of the Christian (not Foucault's) hermeneutics of the self and the idea of the 'double' in Foucault's description of Klossowski's writing where the Same and the Other, God and the Devil, are joined together.¹⁵³ However, Foucault's interest in Klossowski's language (see 'The prose of Actaeon' in this volume) is in framing a thought 'outside dialectics', where everything is 'simulacrum', a mirror of itself.¹⁵⁴ Klossowski offers Foucault a way out of theological dialectics in the attempt to 'sidestep all the Alexandrianism of our culture', which reads the simulacra as signs. The 'time of theologians' is one which divides and immerses itself in the 'ambiguous play of signs', as Foucault states:

Catholics scrutinise signs, Calvinists have no trust at all in them, because they only believe in the election of souls. But what if we were neither signs nor souls, but merely the same as ourselves (neither visible sons of our works, nor predestined), and thereby torn apart in the discrete distance of the simulacrum?¹⁵⁵

According to Foucault we would be richer if we abandoned the divisions of Christian theology. This is not Gnostic theology but a commentary on the value of Klossowski's work in the contemporary literature of France.¹⁵⁶ Foucault may see Klossowski as bringing Christianity under the spell of the Demon, but in the space of the simulacrum Foucault sees the disappearance of theology. Foucault is at this point developing a critique of theology and not, as Miller suggests, developing a Gnostic discourse.

Miller's work demonstrates how he is unable to separate Foucault from the avant-garde writers before him, confusing the works of Bataille and Klossowski with those of Foucault. Many post-structuralist writers, as Goodall has demonstrated in relation to Artaud, focus selectively on issues from the avant-garde and surrealism to serve their own anti-humanist venture. Gnosticism was well suited to undermine Western humanism and provided a rich language to undermine the securities of knowledge: it was as Goodall suggests an 'older and absolute assault' to stand with Nietzsche's own philosophical critique.¹⁵⁷ Miller therefore falls into a double trap in appropriating Gnostic ideas, confusing both Gnosticism and Foucault's use of Klossowski's Gnostic works. The distinction between Klossowski's thinking and Foucault's is given even greater support when we consider how Foucault's political interests took him away from Klossowski's literary influences, a fact made clear by David Macey, who interviewed Klossowski for his own biographical study of Foucault. Commenting on the relationship between Foucault and Klossowski, Macey writes: 'There were, on the other hand, limits to their common interests and Klossowski never really succeeded in interesting Foucault in the gnostics who mean so much to him.'¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, p. 323

¹⁵³ Foucault, 'The prose of Actaeon', pp. 75–6.

¹⁵⁴ Foucault, 'The prose of Actaeon', p. 77.

¹⁵⁵ Foucault, 'The prose of Actaeon', p. 81.

¹⁵⁶ Foucault 'The prose of Actaeon', p. 84.

¹⁵⁷ J. Goodall, *Artaud and the Gnostic Drama*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994, pp. 217–20.

¹⁵⁸ Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, p. 157.

The Gnostic fantasy provides yet further evidence to show how Miller's religious iconography stands as a testimony to misreading Foucault through writers like Bataille and Klossowski. There are many religious fragments and deposits from the avant-garde literature in Foucault's work but none which suggests Foucault is either a mystic or a Gnostic.

Foucault's writing is not, as Miller suggests, 'weird', it makes sense in certain philosophical and literary traditions of French culture, his 'cryptic utterances' are not those of a mystical guru, and he is not captured in such media epithets as 'postmodern sphinx' or 'metaphysical Eraserhead', he is a thinker, to note Bernauer, struggling to escape certain 'prisons' of Western thought and to understand his own sexuality.¹⁵⁹ Miller's work can only be seen, at best, as an unfortunate misreading of the source material, and, at worst, as an outrageous distortion of the gay life and Foucault's engagement with religious ideas.

Miller has left a confused series of religious images floating in Foucault scholarship which need to be critically evaluated. Foucault's work on religious and theological themes needs in this respect to be re-examined with some urgency. There are many religious strands operating in Foucault's work, and more importantly in the writers who influenced his work, that remain unexplored and confused. The texts in this volume provide a new opportunity to explore Foucault's work on religion in order to create a better understanding of Foucault and open again Bernauer's invitation for religious and theological engagement.

Foucault on religion and culture: the texts

I believe that somebody who writes has not got the right to demand to be understood as he had wished to be when he was writing; that is to say from the moment when he writes he is no longer the owner of what he says, except in a legal sense. (Foucault, 'Michel Foucault and Zen', 1978)

Foucault's work on religion is not a systematic treatment of the subject but a series of somewhat fragmented interventions and tactical manoeuvres. They are attempts to 'problematisate' religion in terms of either discursive history, literature, governmentality, sexuality, power or an ethics of the self. Religion for Foucault was always part of a set of force relations and discursive practices which order human life. Foucault's work thus presents a reading of religion outside theological traditions and belief – a reading that does not position religion in some separate realm but inside a political struggle of knowledge-power. In this way Foucault provides a radical framework to question the politics of all religious and theological thinking. He brings religion back into history and back into the immanent struggle of identity and subjectivity.

This volume of texts does not seek to present the religious tropes of Foucault's main work (interesting and significant as they are) but to bring together some previously untranslated texts from *Dits et écrits* and other pieces outside his main work which are either largely inaccessible or thematically important for his work on

religion. As Arnold Davidson has noted: 'With the publication of Michel Foucault's *Dits et écrits* in 1994, we are in a new position to begin to assess the significance of his work.'¹⁶⁰ The Foucault that has been constructed and made into an academic icon in the secondary literature needs to be questioned and broadened in the context of his wider work found in *Dits et écrits*, the Collège de France lectures and other archival material. We need to understand the complexity of Foucault's texts and take them out of the simplistic epithets which attempt to package his key ideas neatly.¹⁶¹ One aspect in appreciating the wider scope of Foucault's work is to rescue the important religious dimensions of his writings. Such an archival process reveals the complexity of a life and a work inescapably reduced in the boundaries of its presentation.

In each of the texts in this volume Foucault opens religion to scrutiny and suspicion according to the concerns that dominate his work at the time. Religion in this sense is always a subsidiary category, a cultural deposit influencing and informing his wider historical and philosophical interests. Religion is a part, a central part, of the cultural conditions of knowledge. In this sense it is very difficult to separate religion and culture; they are interconnected parts of each other. This argument has been developed by Richard King, who has adopted a broadly Foucauldian methodology in developing the idea of 'a mutual imbrication of religion, culture and power'. King argues that the category of religion has been subject to a series of contestations and was isolated from the cultural dynamic, and perceived as an autonomous realm, only after the Enlightenment.¹⁶² Foucault's work directly questions the separation between religion and culture by including it within his 'analysis of the cultural facts' and later collapsing the division between religion and politics in an ethics of the self.¹⁶³ Foucault's work can therefore be seen to move within a discursive space of 'religion and culture' – where one mutually informs the other. As Foucault's work demonstrates, a culture cannot understand itself without first understanding its implicit connection and development within the constructs of religious belief and practice. Contemporary culture is born out of religious traditions and the conditions of our knowledge are therefore embedded in religious discourse. The so-called secular space is itself a hybrid of past religious traditions, and in order to understand contemporary culture Foucault recognised (and was fascinated by) the religious influences upon thought and practice.

¹⁶⁰ A. I. Davidson, 'Structures and strategies of discourse: remarks towards a history of Foucault's philosophy of language' in *Foucault and His Interlocutors*, ed. A. I. Davidson, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1997, p. 1.

¹⁶¹ Take for example Foucault's work on the body. Most commentators examine Foucault's work on the body from 1975 onwards, viewing the body as a passive object, but there is a more complex trajectory behind Foucault's thinking. In Foucault's 1954 introductory essay on Ludwig Binswanger's 'Dream and existence' there are fragments of an imagining body, in 1963 we find an active Sadean body and in 1966 Foucault recognises the 'ambiguous space' of the body. See Foucault [1954], 'Dream, imagination and existence' in *Dream and Existence: Michel Foucault and Ludwig Binswanger*, ed. K. Hoeller, Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, 1993; Foucault [1963], 'A preface to transgression' in this volume, and Foucault [1966], *The Order of Things*, Routledge, London, 1989, p. 314 (American edition: Pantheon, New York, 1970).

¹⁶² King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-colonial Theory, India and the 'Mystic East'*, Routledge, London, 1999. See chapter 2, 'Disciplining religion', and chapter 9, 'Beyond Orientalism'.

¹⁶³ See Foucault [1967], 'Who are you, Professor Foucault?', p. 91 in this volume, and Part 3, pp. 153–97.

The texts in this volume are divided for convenience into three parts. Part 1 deals with Foucault's work on religion in the study of madness and in his literary avant-garde work in the 1960s; Part 2 brings together a number of disparate religious themes from the 1970s, including the emergence of Foucault's concern with Christianity and pastoral power; and Part 3 groups together texts from the early 1980s when Foucault extended his work on early Christian history – originally started in the late 1970s. The final part constitutes work for Foucault's unpublished final volume of the *History of Sexuality*. It marks out the hidden contours of Foucault's work on Christianity. By bringing Foucault's late work on Christianity alongside earlier texts and extracts I am seeking to open up the trajectory of Foucault's religious thought – to provide an account of Foucault on religion and culture. Together these texts provide a unique chronicle of one of the most influential twentieth-century thinkers encountering religion and theology. Finally, these texts attempt to rescue Foucault's unpublished work on religion and open a dialogue terminated by his death.

PART 1: MADNESS, RELIGION AND THE AVANT-GARDE

Following the publication of *Histoire de la folie* in 1961 Foucault was very much in demand to speak. In May 1962 he took part in the Royaumont conference on 'Heresy and society in pre-industrial Europe', contributing a paper on 'Religious deviations and medical knowledge'. This paper continued themes from Foucault's earlier study of madness but instead of focusing on the earlier question of 'silence' and 'unreason' he explored the 'system of the transgressive'. The paper examines the interrelationship between the religious deviation of the demonic and the medicalisation of this parareligious experience. This medicalisation did not replace the supernatural with the pathological but rather established the relationship between the excluded and the included in fantasy. 'Paradoxically doctors of the sixteenth century freed up from the demonic only those things which were inanimate, they placed the demonic in the immediate environs of the soul, at the surface of the body.' There was in effect an alliance or 'annexation' between medicine and religious cosmology. The idea of an 'annexation' was introduced into Foucault's revision of *Maladie mentale et personnalité* in 1962, reflecting the nature of his research at this time.¹⁶⁴ The church and medical institutions formed a 'network' or 'apparatus' to control and exclude. These early lines of thought are important in the way they reveal the oppressive mechanisms of Christianity. Foucault's later work can be seen to examine in greater detail these embryonic ideas of religious exclusion in the religious concept of the demonic in his technology of the self. The notion of the Devil is also significant in so far that it depicts the Other of religious discourse. In Foucault's later essay on the Devil/Other in the work of Klossowski these ideas assume greater significance. Foucault's essay on the demonic and madness can be seen therefore as part of his wider concerns with the marginalised and prohibited which dominates so much of his work, not least in relation to religion.

¹⁶⁴ Foucault [1962], *Mental Illness and Psychology*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1987, p. 65 (also Harper & Row, New York, 1976).

While writers like Midelfort, Sedgwick and Porter have questioned the historical evidence behind Foucault's history of madness, its revisionist approach has none the less been very influential in questioning the progressive models of history.¹⁶⁵ 'Religious deviations and medical knowledge' supplements Foucault's early work on the history of madness by drawing out Foucault's understanding of the history of madness as intrinsically carrying forward religious ideas. It serves to support Foucault's view that the 'complex problem of possession does not belong directly to the history of madness, but to the history of religious ideas'.¹⁶⁶ The religious dynamics of madness in European history form a central, and as yet unexplored, part of Foucault's work. From the 'foolishness' of the Cross to religion as a 'safeguard' of reason in the asylum, there is an important recognition by Foucault of the centrality of Christian imagery to the history of madness. In both *Mental Illness and Psychology* and *Madness and Civilization* Foucault noted how the church and medical establishment interwove complex webs of order around the voice of 'unreason'. The particular focus on religion takes its force not merely from the fact that religious ideas inform Western knowledge but from the way Foucault's history unearths the power of images which shape and order 'madness'. Foucault is interested in the imagination that informs the understanding of madness.

Foucault's work on madness is concerned with 'iconographic powers' in the shaping of madness. It is concerned with an 'imaginary landscape' and the 'reactivation of images'.¹⁶⁷ This particular focus accounts for the many literary allusions in *Madness and Civilization* but it also indicates why Foucault is so concerned with religious ideas. Foucault's work on madness is in fact a twofold imaginative study. He reclaims images of madness from the archive and then inserts his own powerful images into a new history. Foucault realises that it is the imagination which constructs madness.

'Religious deviations and medical knowledge' continues the examination of the religious 'image' by considering how the sixteenth-century writers understood the nature of Satanic possession and the body. Foucault is attempting to show how the imagination is rooted in the physical body through a fusion of religious and medical practices. 'Development of medical knowledge in the sixteenth century is not linked to the replacing of the supernatural by the pathological, but to the appearance of transgressive powers of the body and of the imagination.'

The importance of the imagination, the body and madness is often lost in the examination of Foucault's study of madness, but it relates to the continuing influence

¹⁶⁵ H. C. E. Midelfort, 'Madness and civilization in early modern Europe: a reappraisal of Michel Foucault' in *After the Reformation: Essays in Honor of J. H. Hexter*, ed. Barbara C. Malament, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1988, pp. 247–65; P. Sedgwick, *PsychoPolitics*, Pluto Press, London, 1982, pp. 125–48; R. Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles*, Penguin, London, 1987, pp. 5–9. Cf. W. F. Bynum, R. Porter and M. Shepherd, 'Introduction' in *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry*, Tavistock, London, 1985, vol. 1, 'People and ideas', p. 7.

¹⁶⁶ Foucault, *Mental Illness and Psychology*, p. 64.

¹⁶⁷ Foucault [1961], *Madness and Civilization*, pp. 72; 205–6; 211.

of themes in Foucault's early work on Binswanger. In the foreword to Binswanger's *Dream and Existence* Foucault briefly discusses Spinoza's reflections on the prophetic dream where two sorts of imagining are examined; the imaginings dependent on the body, as in delirium, and the embodied imagination which is a specific form of knowledge.¹⁶⁸ According to Foucault, Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus* operates on these two levels. The prophetic imagination is tied to the body (the affliction of Jeremiah and the anger of Elias) but also holds a meaning, 'the link of imagination to truth' (the language of God). In 'Religious deviations and medical knowledge' Foucault draws out a similar dynamic in the sixteenth century. Spirit (the demonic) and the body are joined in the imagination which allows for an interweaving of religious and medical terminology. Foucault's argument is that the processes of exclusion and inclusion operate in the sixteenth century across religious and medical languages through the dynamic of imagination and the body. As Foucault concludes: 'I believe finally ... that there is a unity of madness with a certain number of phenomena of religious territoriality and that it would be useful to carry out structural study of the whole, a synchronous study, because the system is quite obviously different in each period.'

Foucault's work on the 'transgressive' in religion and madness is also informed by the work of Bataille. It was Bataille who also led Foucault to consider a series of religious questions in relation to sexuality. In a series of pieces for such journals as *Critique* and *Tel Quel*, and in his 1966 work *The Order of Things*, Foucault unfolded a complex series of theological issues around the work of Bataille, Blanchot and Klossowski. This work reveals a significant religious sub-text exploring such issues as eroticism and the death of God. In his 1963 essay 'A preface to transgression' for *Critique* Foucault entertained a number of post-Nietzschean religious themes in Bataille's work. This essay is important because it shows how Foucault adapts and extends Bataille's religious work. Foucault is not simply adopting Bataille's position, as James Miller suggests, but rather interlacing the themes of language, sexuality and the death of God in a new construction of religious discourse. This religious discourse develops Bataille by locating his work in the context of anti-humanist philosophy and contemporary theories of language. As Foucault declares: 'Perhaps the importance of sexuality in our culture, the fact that since Sade it has persistently been linked to the most profound decisions of our language, derives from nothing else than this correspondence which connects it to the death of God.'

The trope of the 'death of God' is a major part of Foucault's engagement with Nietzsche and the avant-garde in the 1960s. Foucault's reading of Nietzsche's death of God is coupled with the death of man and forms the basis for Foucault's own death of God theology in *The Order of Things*. In order to elucidate this key notion I have included a very short interview ('Philosophy and the death of God') which provides an important clarification of how Foucault understands the idea of the death of God. It shows how he distinguishes Nietzsche's use of the term from other philosophers. The text forms an important 'footnote' supplement to Foucault's use of Nietzsche and

Foucault's reworking of Bataille through language and the death of God.¹⁶⁹ What we discover is that death of God leaves an empty space: it has not been filled – the theological space remains open.

Foucault's reflections on avant-garde theological ideas offer new ways of developing an embodied theology from the empty space. With the death of God, the body and sexuality assume a greater importance in the finitude of existence. Elsewhere I have argued that this embodied theology lacks any gender specificity and needs to be critically explored as reflecting a series of masculine models of spirituality which emerge out of French avant-garde religious thinking.¹⁷⁰ From an early stage we see how Foucault's work interweaves religion, the body and sexuality but surprisingly this is often neglected in the literature on religion and body theory.¹⁷¹ What is also not sufficiently appreciated is how the emergence of such glorious ideas as 'body theology, 'polymorphously perverse theology' and 'indecent theology' were already theoretically mapped out by the avant-garde and surrealist writers that Foucault examined.¹⁷²

The avant-garde religious themes are continued in other essays from Foucault's 'literary period'. In his opening comments to a major conference on the novel in 1963 ('The debate on the novel'), organised by the Tel Quel group, Foucault explored the relationship between the literature of the 'new novel' and surrealism. In this discussion Foucault made a significant allusion to 'spiritual experiences'.

I am struck by the fact that, in Sollers's reading yesterday and in the novels of his that I've read, reference is constantly made to a certain number of experiences – experiences, if you like, that I will call, in quotation marks, 'spiritual experiences' (although 'spiritual' is not quite the right word) – such as dreams, madness, folly, repetition, doubling [*le double*], the disruption of time, return [*le retour*], etc. These experiences form a constellation that is doubtless quite coherent. I was also struck by the fact that this constellation was already mapped out in surrealism.

This passage was picked up by James Bernauer in one of the first attempts to explore Foucault's religious writings and opens a huge debate about how Foucault understood the 'spiritual'.¹⁷³ Foucault returns to the idea of the spiritual through out his writings, particularly from the late 1970s, with the idea of a 'political spiritualité' and the idea of

¹⁶⁹ As Foucault in *The Order of Things* points out: 'God is perhaps not so much a region beyond knowledge as something prior to the sentences we speak; and if Western man is inseparable from him, it is not because of some invincible propensity to go beyond the frontiers of experience, but because his language ceaselessly foments him in the shadows of his laws: "I fear indeed that we shall never rid ourselves of God, since we still believe in grammar"' [Nietzsche]. Foucault [1966], *The Order of Things*, p. 298. Cf. F. Nietzsche [1889], *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, Penguin, London, 1968, p. 38; and N. Schiffers, 'Analysing Nietzsche's "God is Dead"' in *Nietzsche and Christianity*, ed. C. Geffré and J.-P. Jossua, T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1981. See my own discussion of Foucault's use of the death of God in J. Carrette, 'Male theology in the bedroom'.

¹⁷⁰ See Carrette, 'Male theology in the bedroom' and J. R. Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*.

¹⁷¹ For an overview of some of the literature on religion and the body see J. Carrette and R. King, 'Giving "birth" to theory'.

¹⁷² See, for example, J. Nelson, *Body Theology*, W/JKP, Louisville, Kentucky, 1992; H. Eilberg-Schwartz, *God's Phallus*, Beacon, Boston, 1994, p. 242; M. Althaus-Reid, 'Sexual strategies in practical theology: indecent theology and the plotting of desire with some degree of success', *Theology and Sexuality*, no. 7, 1997, pp. 45–52; and, J. Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*.

¹⁷³ See Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*.

spirituality as a ‘mode of being’ inside a technology of the self.¹⁷⁴ I have included the extract from ‘Débat sur le roman’, and other short sections from Foucault’s early work, to show the evolution of Foucault’s religious thinking inside his wider concerns. This movement in and out of the sphere of religious discourse serves to illustrate the centrality of religion to the cultural conditions of knowledge and throws light on Foucault’s later work.

In Foucault’s 1964 essay on Klossowski, ‘The prose of Actaeon’, the literary exploration of religious themes continued. As with Foucault’s essay on Bataille, there is always a great danger of confusing Foucault’s work with the avant-garde writers he entertained. While Foucault entertains many religious concepts from avant-garde writers he does not necessarily adopt their position. This is particularly true in the case of Foucault’s essay on Klossowski. Klossowski incorporated many Gnostic themes into his writing but Foucault, as I have indicated earlier, was never fully convinced by these ideas.¹⁷⁵ Foucault’s discussion of Klossowski’s work is however important in so far as it demonstrates his challenge to the binary oppositions between spirit and matter. This is a central theme developed in many earlier surrealist writers and Foucault supports these ideas from his own anti-humanist position.

Concluding the section on Foucault’s avant-garde work on religious ideas is an interview from September 1967, ‘Who are you, Professor Foucault?’ This interview provides a broad overview of Foucault’s work up to 1967 and shows the nature of Foucault’s philosophical critique. It confirms the importance of Nietzsche, Blanchot and Bataille to Foucault’s (religious) thinking and also indicates the importance of Georges Dumézil and Claude Lévi-Strauss. It is through Dumézil (specialist in Indo-European religions and mythologies) and Lévi-Strauss (anthropologist of religion) that we see the tentative emergence of a ‘functionalist’ view of religion.¹⁷⁶ Foucault sees religion, alongside ideologies, philosophies and systems of metaphysics, as part of the mechanism for controlling the function of human life. These ideas would later develop into Foucault’s conceptualisation of religion as a political power and a ‘technology of self’. It shows how Foucault is interested not so much in religious beliefs as in the practice or function of religion.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Foucault [1978], ‘Questions of method’ in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. G. Burchell, C. Gordon and P. Miller, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead, 1991, p. 82; [1984], ‘The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom’ (Interview) in *The Final Foucault*, ed. J. Bernauer and D. Rasmussen, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991, p. 14.

¹⁷⁵ Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, pp. 154–7.

¹⁷⁶ Throughout his work Foucault acknowledged a great debt to the historian of religion Georges Dumézil. See, for example, Foucault’s inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, where Foucault stated: ‘I believe I owe much to Monsieur Dumézil, for it was he who encouraged me to work at an age when I still thought writing a pleasure. But I owe a lot, too, to his work ... It is he who taught me to analyse the internal economy of discourse quite differently from the traditional methods of exegesis or those of linguistic formalism. It is he who taught me to refer the system of functional correlations from one discourse to another by means of comparison. It was he, again, who taught me to describe the transformations of a discourse, and its relations to the institution’ (Foucault, ‘The discourse of language’ in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1972 [appendix] p. 235). For a discussion of the influence of Dumézil on Foucault see: Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, pp. 77–8, and n. 20, pp. 492–3; Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, pp. 75–6; Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault*, pp. 135–6.

¹⁷⁷ This approach to religion was developed by Bryan Turner in his ‘materialist theory of religion’. See B. Turner, *Religion and Social Theory*, p. 13.

PART 2: RELIGION, POLITICS AND THE EAST

Part 2 attempts to show the diversity of Foucault's religious interests in the late 1970s. It brings together a series of interventions, from casual interviews discussing religious rituals to formal lectures on the history of pastoral power. It is during this period that we see not only Foucault's interest in the East but the development of Foucault's view of religion as a political force. It was also during the 1970s that Foucault began to work on Christian confession for his 1976 *The History of Sexuality Volume One: An Introduction*; and in consequence firmly established the influence of Christianity in the emergence of discourses of sexuality in the West. Following this work Foucault, around 1977,¹⁷⁸ started to read the work of the father of Christian monasticism, John Cassian, and thus began the long and awkward journey through the literature of late antiquity. Foucault's *History of Sexuality* from this point on was to face continual reorganisation and postponement as Foucault discovered problems with his original project. This meant that the work on Christianity would be delayed and, as it turned out, remain unpublished. We will explore the shape of the unpublished volume in Part 3, but in the 1970s Foucault would firmly ground religion in the political realm.

One of the most intriguing set of comments Foucault made about religion occurred in a series of taped interviews with Thierry Voeltzel, 'a young hitch-hiker picked up by Foucault in 1975'.¹⁷⁹ The document was originally brought to light by Claude Mauriac and published as *Vingt ans et après* (*Twenty Years and After*). It was brought to the notice of the English-speaking world through the biographical work of Didier Eribon and David Macey in the early 1990s. It reveals Foucault in a more relaxed mood talking about a whole range of issues. A small section of these interviews, 'On religion', contained some revealing comments by Foucault's about the church and religious rituals. Although this interview cannot be held in the same light as his other work, it does throw a wider perspective on Foucault's interest in religion. It reveals the fascination, intrigue and passion Foucault held for religion and his understanding of religion as a political force. Some may regard the dialogue with Thierry Voeltzel as insignificant but it provides an insight into Foucault's personal interest in religion, an aspect picked up by many who knew Foucault personally.¹⁸⁰ No doubt this interest was in part motivated by Foucault's French Catholic background.

In 1978 Foucault made a second trip to Japan, the first trip having taken place in 1970.¹⁸¹ During the visit Foucault had a busy schedule and gave a series of lectures and interviews. His visits to Japan had opened up his interest in Zen Buddhism, and in an interview with a Zen Buddhist priest Foucault briefly explored the relationship between Eastern and Western religious thinking. The interview, 'Michel Foucault and Zen: a stay in a Zen temple', also reflects upon a variety of issues such as meditation,

¹⁷⁸ Tape C16 'Discussion with philosophers, 23 October 1980, Berkeley, California' in the Foucault Archive, Paris.

¹⁷⁹ Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, p. xxi.

¹⁸⁰ I have been pleased to discover in talking to those who knew Foucault in the USA that they remember his real fascination with religion, and the Voeltzel piece perhaps captures this personal interest.

¹⁸¹ For an account of Foucault's visit to Japan see Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, pp. 399–401 and Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, p. 310.

mysticism and Marxism. Although Foucault's understanding of Zen is simplistic and the concept of 'mysticism' has since been deconstructed with Foucault's own methodology, the interview is important in so far as it shows the scope of Foucault's interest in Eastern religious thinking.

It is possible to identify a small strand of comparative philosophical work on the boundaries of Foucault's writings but it always remains marginal and open to Orientalist critique. We find, for example, the famous passage from the Chinese encyclopaedia at the beginning of *The Order of Things*, regarded by Larson as 'poetic projection', and the contrast between 'ars erotica' of Eastern traditions and the Western 'scientia sexualis'. There are also brief comparisons between Greek, Christian and Chinese constructions of the desiring subject.¹⁸² Uta Liebmann Schaub has gone as far to argue that there is an Oriental sub-text in Foucault's work and that a correspondence can be established between Foucault's early writing and Oriental concepts, such as those found in the Mahayana Buddhist tradition of Nāgārjuna.¹⁸³ Foucault's early work on language and the avant-garde does offer striking parallels with non-dualist philosophical ideas, and perhaps minor strands of Eastern thinking do emerge but we need to be critical of the Orientalist assumption behind such tropes and ask whose interests are served through such comparative engagement.¹⁸⁴ This of course is not to diminish Foucault's peripheral interest in Eastern traditions and from the interview at the Zen temple we have a sense of how seriously he takes religious ideas and his respect for cultures of 'silence'. As Foucault reflected in 1982, no doubt to some extent recalling his experiences in Japan:

Silence may be a much more interesting way of having a relationship with people ... I think silence is one of those things that has unfortunately been dropped from our culture. We don't have a culture of silence; we don't have a culture of suicide either. The Japanese do, I think. Young Romans or young Greeks were taught to keep silent in very different ways according to the people with whom they were interacting. Silence was then a specific form of experiencing a relationship with others. This is something that I believe is really worthwhile cultivating. I'm in favour of developing silence as a cultural ethos.¹⁸⁵

One of the many lectures given during Foucault's 1978 visit to Japan was delivered at the University of Tokyo. This paper, 'Sexuality and power', is important in so far as it brings together themes from Foucault's 1976 *History of Sexuality* and new ideas from his 1977–8 Collège de France lectures on 'Security, territory, and population'. In these lectures Foucault began to explore the theme of 'governmentality', examining the 'procedures and means employed to ensure, in a given society, the "government of

¹⁸² G. J. Larson, 'Introduction: the "age-old distinction between the same and the other" in *Interpreting Across Boundaries: New Essays In Comparative Philosophy*', ed. G. J. Larson and E. Deutsch, Motilal Banarsi das, Delhi, 1988, p. 4; Foucault [1966], *The Order of Things*, p. xv; Foucault [1976], *The History of Sexuality Volume One: An Introduction*, p. 59; Foucault [1983], 'On the genealogy of ethics', p. 359; 'Discussion with Michel Foucault', April 1983, manuscript D250 (12), Foucault Archive, Paris.

¹⁸³ U. L. Schaub, 'Foucault's Oriental subtext', *PMLA*, vol. 104, 1989, pp. 306–16.

¹⁸⁴ For a more detailed discussion of Nāgārjuna (second century CE) in his context and the Orientalist problematic, see R. King, *Indian Philosophy: An Introduction*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1999. I am grateful to Richard King for his reflections on Nāgārjuna and comparative philosophy.

¹⁸⁵ Foucault, 'The minimalist self', interview in June 1982, in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, p. 4; for a discussion of Foucault and silence see Carrette, *Foucault and Religion*.

men'.¹⁸⁶ This analysis of government included an exploration of pastoral power in Hebrew and Christian society. Pastoral power, as Foucault indicated in his Collège de France course outline, is a

power that individualizes by granting, through an essential paradox, as much value to a single one sheep as to the entire flock. It is this type of power that was introduced into the West by Christianity and took an institutional form in the ecclesiastical pastorate: the government of souls was constituted in the Christian Church as a central, knowledge-based activity indispensable for the salvation of each and everyone.¹⁸⁷

This interest in the pedagogical and spiritual dimension of government was to open Foucault's study of Christianity. It extended the work on confession and psycho-analysis into a wider technology of self.

The 1978 Tokyo lecture reflects the beginnings of Foucault's analysis of the Christian 'hermeneutics of the self'. It firstly restates the dynamic of confession and then secondly draws out the structures of pastoral power through the dynamics of obedience and salvation. Foucault's overriding concern in this work is the relationship of the subject to truth – the way Christianity produces a certain 'truth' of the individual. 'Truth, the production of interior truth, the production of subjective truth, is a fundamental element in the practice of the pastor.' These ideas would be developed in greater detail in the 1980s and lead to the paradox of the Christian care of the self in 'renunciation'.¹⁸⁸ It is striking to see how many of the late themes of Foucault's work were present in 1978. In the Tokyo lecture we already see Foucault arguing that Christianity is introducing 'new techniques' for sexuality rather than 'new moral ideas'. This argument would form the underlying force of the second and third volumes of his *History of Sexuality* and indicates how Foucault shaped the study of the Graeco-Roman world around his earlier understanding of Christianity.

The theme of pastoral power returned to prominence just over a year later when Foucault delivered the Tanner Lectures on Human Values at Stanford University in October 1979. In this lecture, originally titled 'Omnès et Singulatim: towards a criticism of political reason' (in this volume 'Pastoral power and political reason'), Foucault brings together his themes of the government of individuals and the government of the state. He attempts to outline the origin of pastoral power and its alignment with the secular political rationality of the state. Foucault's overall aim is to demonstrate the 'development of power techniques oriented towards individuals' – the way the state orders the truth of subjects. According to Foucault the state is the centralised power and pastorsehip is the 'individualising power'. These techniques of power are joined together in a secular form in the problem of the welfare state. Many of these issues directly reflect the concerns in Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France on issues of 'biopolitics', by which he meant 'the endeavour, begun in the

¹⁸⁶ Foucault, 'Security, territory, and population' in *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: The Essential Works of Foucault*, ed. Paul Rabinow, New Press, New York, 1997, p. 67.

¹⁸⁷ Foucault, 'Security, territory, and population', p. 68.

¹⁸⁸ See Foucault, 'About the beginnings of the hermeneutics of the self' in this volume, and Foucault [1984], 'The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom', pp. 5–9. Cf. Foucault [1982], 'Technologies of the self' in *Technologies of the Self*, pp. 16–49.

eighteenth century, to rationalize the problems presented to governmental practice by the phenomena characteristic of a group of living human beings constituted as a population.¹⁸⁹ It is through this work that Foucault is able to break down the separation between the individual and the political. The individual is always for Foucault inescapably caught within the wider political technologies of control.

Political rationality has grown and imposed itself all through the history of Western societies. It first took its stand on the idea of pastoral power, then on that of reason of state. Its inevitable effects are both individualisation and totalisation.

In the Tanner Lectures we see Foucault's growing interest in ancient Christian literature, with reference to Chrysostom, Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome and Cassian, and his recognition of the importance of self-examination and the guidance of conscience for Christian living. This material would eventually form the basis of his 1980 lecture series at the Collège de France and bring Christianity to the centre of Foucault's work. (See 'On the government of the living' in this volume). The religious practices of Christianity, and the insights from the Graeco-Roman world, had introduced a complex structuring of the self.

We can say that Christian pastorship has introduced a game that neither the Greeks nor the Hebrews imagined. A strange game whose elements are life, death, truth, obedience, individuals, self-identity; a game which seems to have nothing to do with the game of the city surviving through the sacrifice of the citizens.

It is through the creative deployment of the concept of 'governmentality' as the 'techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour' that Foucault is able to bring the state and individual together inside the idea of pastoral power.¹⁹⁰ There is a fusing of the political and the individual which leads in turn to a collapsing of the boundaries between politics, religion and the ethics of self. For Foucault it is the interlocking of the government of self and the government of state that forms the basis of a 'political spirituality'. As Foucault wrote in 1978:

How can one analyze the connection between ways of distinguishing true and false and ways of governing oneself and others? The search for a new foundation for each of these practices, in itself and relative to the other, the will to discover a different way of governing oneself through a different way of dividing up true and false – this is what I would call 'political spirituality'.¹⁹¹

Religion for Foucault is always part of a political technology governing the self.

The location of religion inside the political arena took on a new dimension when Foucault became interested in the Iranian Revolution in 1978/9 and carried out a series of journalistic 'reportages' for the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*.¹⁹² Foucault's interest in Iran is important to the development of Foucault's views on religion in so far that Foucault sees religious inspiration as bringing about political change. The Iranian Revolution in 1978 fascinated Foucault precisely because of its religious basis. In a 1979 interview Foucault suggested that religion for the Iranian people 'was like

¹⁸⁹ Foucault, *The Essential Foucault*, p. 73.

¹⁹⁰ Foucault [1980], 'On the government of living', see pp. 154–7 in this volume.

¹⁹¹ Foucault [1978], 'Questions of method', p. 82.

¹⁹² See Stauth, 'Revolution in spiritless times', and Macey, *The Lives of Michel Foucault*, pp. 406–11.

the promise and guarantee of finding something that would radically change their subjectivity'.¹⁹³ Here again we see the interlocking of the political ideology of the state with the construction of the religious subject.

Although many commentators now feel that Foucault misjudged the Iranian question in his journalist 'reportages', the issues of a 'political spirituality' relate to important aspects of Foucault's interest in governmentality and his wider attempt to understand the politics of religion.¹⁹⁴ In 1979, after receiving criticism for his reporting of the Iranian Revolution, Foucault wrote an article for *Le Monde* reflecting on the situation. In this article ('Is it useless to revolt?') Foucault examined the religious motivation behind the Iranian Revolution. The article shows clearly the dilemma Foucault faced between an intellectual interest in 'live revolts' and the political consequences. The paper however does provide a valuable insight into how Foucault sought to extend his ideas of a 'political spirituality' into a non-Christian context. The negative responses to his reports of the Iranian Revolution may have disillusioned Foucault in his attempt to understand state politics and religion, but his examination of a 'political spirituality' was to continue in his examination of early Christian literature and the ethics of the self – the final and unfinished project.

PART 3: CHRISTIANITY, SEXUALITY AND THE SELF: FRAGMENTS OF AN UNPUBLISHED VOLUME

In a discussion with Paul Rabinow and Hubert Dreyfus in 1983 Foucault explained he had written a book on the early Christian experience of the flesh, sex and desire.¹⁹⁵ Foucault explained how the work examined the new techniques of the self introduced by Christianity, a feature already indicated in the Tokyo lecture of 1978. At this point Foucault seemed to think 'the Christian book', as he came to call it, would appear after *L'usage des plaisirs* (*The Use of Pleasure*) but Foucault would juggle the material around again to allow for another volume, *Le souci de soi* (*The Care of the Self*).¹⁹⁶ The Christian book had from the beginning of the project on sexuality been the intended second volume.¹⁹⁷ In 1977, a year after the publication of the first introductory text, Foucault was grappling with Tertullian and the church in late antiquity in preparation for such a volume: 'We have had sexuality since the eighteenth century, and sex since the nineteenth. What we had before that was no doubt the flesh. The basic originator of it all was Tertullian.'¹⁹⁸ Foucault actually finished a version of the work on Christianity, presumably in the late 1970s. The work however faced a number of unforeseen

¹⁹³ Foucault, 'Iran: the spirit of a world without spirit' in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, Routledge, London and New York, 1988, p. 218.

¹⁹⁴ See Foucault [1978], 'Governmentality', pp. 87–104.

¹⁹⁵ Foucault, 'Discussion with Michel Foucault: 19 April 1983', *Mss. D250(5)** and *Tape C27**, Foucault Archive, Paris.

¹⁹⁶ Foucault [1983], 'On the genealogy of ethics: an overview of work in progress' in *The Foucault Reader*, ed Paul Rabinow, Penguin, London and New York, 1991, p. 358; Foucault [1984], *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume Two*; Foucault [1984], *The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality Volume Three*, Penguin, London, 1990 (American edition: Pantheon, New York, 1986).

¹⁹⁷ The back cover of the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* in 1976 had indicated that a second volume entitled *La chair et le corps* (*Flesh and Body*) would appear but owing to the problems outlined below it was postponed, reshaped and retitled. See Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, pp. 273–4.

¹⁹⁸ Foucault [1977], 'The confession of the flesh' (a discussion) in *Power/Knowledge*, p. 211.

problems and multiple reworkings. Foucault recognised that his introductory ‘clichés’ about the Graeco-Roman world, the first forty pages in his planned second volume on Christianity, contained many errors and needed to be substantially corrected.¹⁹⁹ He realised he could not write about the Christian tradition until he had explored its antecedents.

I wondered what the technology of the self before Christianity was, or where the Christian technology of the self came from, and what kind of sexual ethics was characteristic of ancient culture. And then I was obliged after I finished *Les Aveux de la chair*, the book about Christianity, to reexamine what I said in the introduction to *L'Usage des plaisirs* about the supposed pagan ethics, because what I has said about pagan ethics were only clichés borrowed from secondary texts.²⁰⁰

The change of order in Foucault’s History of Sexuality was coupled with new developments in Foucault’s thinking about ‘governmentality’ and ‘techniques of the self’. The material on Christianity was thus reconfigured in terms of a genealogy of ethics – an ethics conceived as *rapport à soi* (the relationship to oneself).

In the Christian book – I mean the book about Christianity! – I try to show that [Greek] ethics has changed. Because the telos has changed: the telos is immortality, purity, and so on. The asceticism has changed, because now self-examination takes the form of self-deciphering. The mode d’assujettissement [mode of subjection] is now divine law. And I think that even the ethical substance has changed, because it is not *aphrodisia*, but desire, concupiscence, flesh, and so on.²⁰¹

The ethical themes in Graeco-Roman and Christian ethics were the same but the techniques of the self were substantially different. Foucault in effect identified a different ethical ‘formula’ in Christianity which placed the emphasis on the control of desire.²⁰² *Les aveux de la chair* (*Confessions of the Flesh*) was thus rewritten and transformed in the mind of Foucault – in lectures, interviews and articles – but it did not appear in final print.

Part 3 in this volume is an attempt to bring together some of the fragments behind Foucault’s final volume. It does not represent every lecture and article which would have shaped the contours of Foucault volume but brings together a selection of the central documents, including a course outline, lecture transcripts and a published extract. These pieces, with the material from the 1970s, undoubtedly constitute research work for *Les aveux de la chair*. There are other fragments from interviews and lectures in the early 1980s which further supplement these central texts but on the whole the other pieces only replicate or elaborate material contained in this selection.²⁰³

According to the final advertising statement for the History of Sexuality, written by Foucault and distributed in June 1984, *Les aveux de la chair* would ‘treat the experience of the flesh in the early centuries of Christianity and the role played by hermeneutics and the purifying process of deciphering desire’.²⁰⁴ Each of the pieces included in this

¹⁹⁹ See Foucault, ‘Discussion with Michel Foucault: 19 April 1983’, MSS. D250(5)*, Tape C27*, Foucault Archive, Paris.

²⁰⁰ Foucault, ‘On the genealogy of ethics’, pp. 341–2.

²⁰¹ Foucault, ‘On the genealogy of ethics’, p. 358.

²⁰² Foucault, ‘On the genealogy of ethics’, p. 359.

²⁰³ See, for example, Foucault, ‘Technologies of the self’; Foucault, ‘The ethic of care for the self as a practice of freedom’, pp. 1–20.

²⁰⁴ Quoted in Eribon, Michel Foucault, pp. 320–1.

selection covers material under this brief remit. The outline of the book undoubtedly covers work on John Cassian and monasticism, some work on Augustine,²⁰⁵ and undoubtedly sections on the Christian hermeneutics of the self – themes captured in the material for this volume. Until the final editing and shape of *Les aveux de la chair* is made known through publication we will have to rely on the fragments that remain.

The first 'fragment' of documentation reflecting Foucault's rethinking of *Les aveux de la chair* is the course summary of 1980, 'On the government of the living'. This summary, as with the other course outlines, stands as a crucial benchmark in the evolution of Foucault's work. It firmly locates the broad parameters of Foucault's work on Christian history in terms of the government of self, the examination of conscience, confession and monastic practice. It shows the continuing importance of John Cassian to Foucault's thinking and also indicates how Foucault has extended his original work on Christian confession. These excursions into Christian themes were enhanced by Foucault's move to the Bibliothèque du Saulchoir, a Dominican library in the south-east of Paris, which contained a valuable collection of works on Christianity in late antiquity.

In 1980 Foucault also gave a series of lectures in the United States on themes of early Christian history and sexuality. The next two 'fragments' are taken from this series of lectures. The first of the two texts is the transcript of the lectures given at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, which incorporates slight changes from the Howison Lectures given earlier at Berkeley. 'About the beginning of the hermeneutics of the self' consists of two lectures, one on Greek philosophy and the other, following similar issues on the genealogy of the modern subject, on Christian confession. These lectures reveal how Foucault had formulated in his late work a new framework around the technology of self in both Greek and Christian history. The lecture on Christianity explored the work of Tertullian, John Chrysostom and John Cassian in terms of confession and self-examination. In his examination of these thinkers Foucault uncovered the techniques through which the Christian self was constructed. As Foucault stated:

In the Christian technologies of the self, the problem is to discover what is hidden inside the self; the self is like a text or like a book that we have to decipher, and not something which has to be constructed by the superposition, the superimposition, of the will and the truth.

These lectures link very strongly with Foucault's 1982 lectures at the University of Vermont on *The Technologies of Self*. They show clearly the structure of thinking behind the final volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* as located in techniques of the self and ethics.

The second American lecture in this section is the 1980 James Lecture, entitled 'Sexuality and solitude', given at the Institute for Humanities in New York. This lecture starts in a similar fashion to the other 1980 American lectures but notably focuses

²⁰⁵ Foucault not only makes reference to Augustine in the James Lecture, included in this collection, but he also responds to questions on Augustine in his discussion with philosophers at Berkeley in 1980. See Foucault, 'Discussion with philosophers: 23rd October 1980', Tape C16*, Foucault Archive. It is reasonable to assume that sections on Augustine are included in the unpublished volume. Cf. Foucault, 'On the genealogy of ethics', p. 347.

more on St Augustine. In this lecture Foucault compares a text by the pagan philosopher Artemidorus on dream interpretation with the fourteenth book of St Augustine's *City of God*. The comparison enables Foucault to demonstrate how Christianity established a 'new type of relationship' between sex and subjectivity. Foucault establishes that Augustine's sexual ethic is concerned with male sexuality and the issue of the internal control of the libido. As Foucault states:

The question is not, as it was in Artemidorus, the problem of penetration: it is the problem of erection. As a result, it is not the problem of a relationship to other people, but the problem of the relationship of oneself to oneself, or, more precisely, the relationship between one's will and involuntary assertions.

The techniques of self-examination in Christianity were the main focus of Foucault's study of Christianity and are shown clearly in Foucault's essay on the monastic writer John Cassian. In his 1982 essay 'The battle for chastity', an extract from the unpublished fourth volume, Foucault shows the extent of self-analysis in the Christian monastic tradition. In Cassian's work there is 'a whole technique for analysing and diagnosing thought, its origins, its qualities, its dangers, its potential for temptation and all the dark forces that lurk behind the mask it may assume'. In his focus on Cassian, Foucault showed the detailed techniques for rooting out desire and the procedures for renouncing the self. It was with this ultimate tension and paradox of Christianity – a self opposed to God's will and a self found in the renunciation of self – that Foucault brought his *History of Sexuality* to a conclusion. Perhaps Foucault's *History of Sexuality* had been a long struggle to overcome the oppression of Christianity and its denial of the body, desire and the flesh. As Foucault concluded his Dartmouth lectures:

Maybe our problem is now to discover that the self is nothing else than the historical correlation of the technology built in our history. Maybe the problem is to change those technologies. And in this case, one of the main political problems would be nowadays, in the strict sense of the word, the politics of ourselves.

In Didier Eribon's biography of Foucault we learn from an interview with Pierre Nora that Foucault had expressed the wish for 'no "posthumous publications"'.²⁰⁶ This did not affect Foucault's Collège de France lectures, which were apparently 'open to discussion' and which started to appear in publication in 1997.²⁰⁷ However, the final volume of his *History of Sexuality* which required only minor 'editorial tidying up' and was possibly one or two months away from completion, could not be published. It was in effect locked, at the point of Foucault's death, in the debates about Foucault's intended wishes. It remains a mystery to Foucault scholarship, a mystery similar to the final enigmatic work of Roussel, *How I Wrote Certain Books*, a work simultaneously revealing and concealing.²⁰⁸ *Les aveux de la chair* holds a similar key to Roussel's enigma.

²⁰⁶ Eribon, Michel Foucault, p. 323.

²⁰⁷ 'Il faut défendre la société': Cours au Collège de France, 1976, Hautes Études, Gallimard/Seuil, Paris, 1997. The Collège de France lectures are due to appear in English translation.

²⁰⁸ See Foucault [1963], *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel*, Athlone, London, 1987 (American edition: Doubleday, New York, 1986).

It is the pivotal work of the *History of Sexuality* and, according to Pierre Nora, ‘the part most important to Foucault’.²⁰⁹ Yet for all its near-completion and the fact that many close to the Foucault archive have seen it, *Les aveux de la chair* remains unpublished. What makes this even more surprising is the fact that parts of the work already exist in the pieces which Foucault had agreed to publish before his death. Foucault’s death denied him and those he left behind the completed work – the fragments however remain.

²⁰⁹ See Eribon, Michel Foucault, p. 324.

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